Damayanti and Nala

The Many Lives of a Story

Edited by
Susan S. Wadley

SHOUT
SHARE
IT

Best known in its Mahabharata rendition, the story of Damayanti and Nala is found throughout India, in numerous guises – as Kangra paintings, as stories told for women's *vrats* in Rajasthan, as part of an oral epic in Uttar Pradesh, as classical Telugu poetry. It is found in versions written for Hindus, Jains, and Muslims, and in many of the languages of India including Malayalam, Assamese, Telugu and Tamil, as well as Persian and Sanskrit. Wonderfully adaptive, able to be re-visioned for the many purposes of its tellers, the story of Damayanti and her lover and spouse Nala tells of love, devotion, the meaning of being human, the play of the gods, and the worship of and making of things godly. It also tells of separation, sorrow, ritual mistakes, and unjust accusations.

As the contexts of these many tellings of the story vary, so too do some of the most familiar pieces of the story – some lack the dice game, others the ritual mistake that leads to Nala's banishment in many tellings. This volume, with papers by anthropologists, Sanskritists, scholars of religion, historians, literary scholars and folklorists, explores the many "tellings" of the story of Damayanti and Nala, giving us new understandings of this popular story.

ISBN 81-8028-037-3
Rs 750

Damayanti and Nala

The Many Lives of a Story

Damayanti and Nala

The Many Lives of a Story

Edited by
Susan S. Wadley

CHRONICLE BOOKS
An Imprint of DC Publishers
New Delhi
2011

© Susan S. Wadley 2011

Chronicle Books is an imprint of DC Publishers

Distributed by
Orient Blackswan Limited

Bangalore Bhopal Bhubaneshwar Chandigarh
Chennai Ernakulam Guwahati Hyderabad Jaipur
Kolkata Lucknow Mumbai New Delhi Patna

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of DC Publishers, or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics rights organization.

ISBN 81-8028-037-3

Typeset in Plantin 10/13.5
by Eleven Arts, New Delhi
Printed in India by Saurabh Printers, Noida, U.P.
Published by DC Publishers
S 7 & 8 Green Park Main Market, New Delhi 110016
email chroniclebooks@gmail.com

Contents

Preface vii
Susan S. Wadley

1. Nala: The Life of a Story 1
Velcheru Narayana Rao and David Shulman

2. The Story of Nala 13
David Shulman and Velcheru Narayana Rao

3. An Indo-Persian Retelling of Nala and Damayanti 38
Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam

4. Nal and Damayanti's Reversals of Fortune: Perspectives on When a Woman Should Know Better 82
Lindsey Harlan

5. Damyanti's String: Epic Threads in Women's Ritual Stories 109
Ann Grodzins Gold

6. Pandvani Heroines, Chhattisgarhi Daughters 130
Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger

7. Raja Nal's *Purāṇa* and the Jat Kingdoms of Braj 155
Susan S. Wadley

8. The Performative Context of Nala in Late Medieval Kerala 187
Rich Freeman

9. Nala's Weakness and Damayanti's Powers: Jain Tellings of the Great Love Story 242
M. Whitney Kelting

10. Leaving Damayanti Again (and Again): Jain Retellings of the Nala Story 265
Phyllis Granoff

11. Nala Unhinged: Pukalentippulavar's *Nalavenpa* 283
David Shulman

References 316

Index 333

Preface

Damayanti and Nala are lovers whose story finds many lives within the Indian sub-continent. Best known to scholars of South Asia through the version in the *Mahābhārata* that is also a staple of introductory Sanskrit classes, Damayanti's and Nala's story also appears as a Persian love story, as a didactic story in Jain traditions, and in languages ranging from Braj and Marwari in the north to Tamil and Malayalam in the south of the sub-continent. The papers in this volume reflect a small portion of those vast retellings of one of South Asia's favorite love stories, sometimes making it a political story (Wadley), while at other times it becomes part of women's ritual (Gold; Harlan); religious teaching (Granoff; Kelting); temple ritual (Freeman), or just remains a love story but with Hindu or Muslim flavors (Shulman and Narayana Rao; Alam and Subrahmanyam).

This volume has its first telling at the Wisconsin South Asia conference sometime in the early 1990s and then as a panel at the 11th International Conference on Folk Narrative, Mysore, India, in January 1995. Other papers were gradually added over the next ten years.

I thank David Shulman and Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger for their tolerance at the many questions and for their sage advice as this volume was completed. I thank the authors for their patience in what ended up being an inexplicably long process toward publication.

The many lives of Damayanti and Nala await your reading.

Susan S. Wadley
Syracuse University
January, 2010

Nala: The Life of a Story

Velcheru Narayana Rao • David Shulman

Āsīd rājā nalo nāma...

["There was a king named Nala...."]

How many generations of Western Sanskritists began their reading of classical texts with these words? The *Mahābhārata* episode known as the *Nalopākhyāna* is an elegant, fast-paced narrative, in relatively simple style, ideal for beginners. Moreover, the story it tells is one of the most popular in India, existing in all Indian languages, often in many versions in each language. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Nala stories exist. Wherever one goes in the sub-continent, Nala was there first.

All this profusion has created an illusion. We—philologists, anthropologists, folklorists, literary scholars—act as if there were such a thing as the "Nala story." True, we allow for the existence of many variants (or, to use A. K. Ramanujan's [1997] term, "tellings") of this story, each with its own integrity. We can, then, speak, if we wish, about "Many Nalas." The presupposition is that somewhere—no doubt in the *Mahābhārata,* the oldest attested version—an Ur-Nala can be identified. The hundreds of recorded versions would thus be, in some sense, variations or transformations of that Ur text.

Such a model has been applied, with some success, to the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* as well as to a number of other South Asian narratives. We naturally gravitate to the oldest version we have, which we take as primary. Sometimes we have used the metaphor

of grammar to describe the field of transformation. The *Rāmāyaṇa* would constitute a language, capable of generating an infinite number of sentences. Such a grammar, like any other, has its limits. It is possible to produce ungrammatical *Rāmāyaṇas*, like ungrammatical sentences. Native speakers of this language will immediately identify and reject such a sentence. For example: "Sita marries Ravana" is a sentence that has no place in the *Rāmāyaṇa* language.

On the other hand, certain modern speakers of this language may choose to speak ungrammatically. Whether their sentences still belong within the *Rāmāyaṇa* language or not is an open question, constantly discussed in India in our generation. Paula Richman (1991, 2001) has devoted much attention to such questions by seeking out the continuous transformations of the *Rāmāyaṇa* materials in both classical and modern cultural milieux. Somewhere at the root of this endeavor lies the notion of an implicitly normative or constraining core text.

Scholars of the *Mahābhārata,* such as Alf Hiltebeitel (1999) and Madeleine Biardeau (1984; 2002), have built upon assumptions of some such unity in exploring the profound continuities between the Sanskrit "Vyasa" text and various levels of its transformation in ritual and village cults. The latter can be shown to illuminate the former, even as the text gives elements of meaning and sense to the cult. Themes latent or marginal to the "Vyasa" text may leap to life, or become intelligible in new ways, when *Mahābhārata* textual materials emerge in a ritual performance. This is not the place to discuss the question of origins—which level is primary, and which secondary, or if these distinctions in fact have any meaning. Recently, new models have been proposed for understanding the growth and expansion of the *Mahābhārata* text (Reich 1998); here, too, issues of coherence and continuity have a pressing force. Similar problems arise regularly in the study of oral epics and their relation to a presumed historical past (Smith 1989, 1991).

But let us take a different route. In Akira Kurasawa's famous film *Rashomon,* we see four independent narratives about an "event" that transpired one day in the forest. The set of characters is stable:

there is a nobleman, his wife, a brigand, and a spectator. Each tells his or her story. These stories do not coincide and are not variants of one master narrative; nor are they variants of one another. The pieces are rearranged according to individual perception and experience. It is impossible to tell the story without adopting one or another of these narratives. It is also impossible to determine which of them is "correct," as the judge in the film discovers. These are four incompatible truths, each with its own autonomy and integrity, though all apparently relate to the same event, whatever it was. How would one set about writing a grammar for such a set of tellings?

If we reduce the narrative to its bare, minimalist core of shared participants, time and space, we are left without a story. Virtually nothing more could be said. If we expand the narrative to reflect a possibly rational, probabilistic or common-sense version, we may have destroyed the truth or invented an entirely non-existent truth. However satisfying this may be to our scholarly pursuits, it is probably better to live with the anxiety of not knowing.

Some such model, we suggest, is most suited to the "Nala story" in its nearly endless configurations.

Each Nala text has an independent existence. If you ask someone in South Asia what happened to Nala, they will come up with a narrative in accordance with their situation, their perspective, the particular context in which they are speaking. There is no way to determine which of these many tellings is more grammatical than any other.

But, you will say, how could this be the case? Do we not all know—especially those of us who have read the *Mahābhārata*'s *Nalopākhyāna* at some formative moment in our lives—that Nala was a near-perfect man who fell in love with Damayanti, who fell in love with him and identified him from among a series of five exact replicas? Did this happy couple not later suffer the agonies of separation and disguise after Nala staked his entire kingdom in a game of dice with his brother, Pushkara, and lost? And did he not regain his kingdom after Damayanti recognized him a second time, so that the story achieves a happy closure? Does it not protect the

listener from snakebite and the terrors of *kali-doṣa*, the evils of the present, degenerative age? Who does not know the *śloka* that promises this relief?

No doubt we do know this—but not from pooling the endless examples of Nala texts. They hardly agree. We know it from the *Mahābhārata*, which we unnecessarily and unjustifiably assume to be the parent of all Nala stories. But even the *Mahābhārata* narrative is motivated and context-dependent. Yudhisthira needs to hear this story about a king who lost everything at dice and later regained his losses. He derives a certain false comfort from listening to Brihadasva talking about Nala. The story shapes itself to Yudhisthira's condition and becomes analogical in structure. If there is a deeper characteristic here, it is precisely in the story's ability to shape itself each time to a new context. The *Mahābhārata* Nala already exhibits this quality. The story, whatever we mean by this term, existed before this "first" telling. No telling available to us is without this feature.

Or take the *śloka*:

kārkotākasya nāgasya damayantyā nalasya ca/
ṛtuparṇasya rājarṣe kīrttanaṃ kali-nāśanam//

"Sing of the serpent Karkotaka, of Damayanti and Nala
and the royal sage Rituparna, and you will be free
from the fear of Kali."

This looks like a grammar of the entire Nala corpus, reduced to its minimally necessary elements. The story is, then, about these four figures and, when told, saves the hearer from the Kali Age. Kali himself had wanted to marry Damayanti but was too late for the *svayamvara*, so out of revenge he finds a way into Nala's body, distorts his behavior, and puts him through terrible suffering. Karkotaka adds to this sequence the distorting disguise that is also a kind of blessing and a renewed test for Damayanti. Rtuparna teaches Nala the *akṣa-hridaya*, the "heart of the dice," which releases him from the burning inner torment of Kali and allows for the happy reunion with Damayanti. The central theme of the dice-game, which many would no doubt insist upon as the core of the story, is intimated here by the reference to Kali. Narrating this story is a ritual move. The underlying anxiety has to do with snakes and possible misfortune.

In another age, we might have been tempted to derive, literally, the entire corpus of Nala tales from this densely compacted *śloka*. It is always pleasant to find a point of origin. But if we look at the verse in terms of its determining context, we can see that the story has adapted itself precisely to this compelling need or anxiety. The point is not to derive the whole narrative out of a single encapsulation but to observe this striking plasticity and generativity.

Is it possible, then, to imagine a non-grammatical Nala telling? For example, can the story end unhappily? Yes. The temple tradition at Tirunallaru, in the Tamil country, tells us that Nala, after being restored to his former "self" and to Damayanti, becomes depressed. He has to make a pilgrimage to Tirunallaru and worship the god Shani there to extricate himself from this situation. Maybe there is something unsatisfying about happy endings.

Could we imagine a Nala story without the dice-game? Yes. Śrīnatha's *Śriṅgārā-naiṣadhamu*, based on Śrīharṣa's Sanskrit *Naiṣadhacarita* (1965), ends after the *svayamvara*, with the wedding and love-games of the young couple. Damayanti recognizes Nala out of the five look-alike contenders in a particularly sophisticated and penetrating scene. Once having achieved this, however, her troubles are over and the story can end (though we do encounter Kali and his as yet unfulfilled plans). Still, for Śrīharṣa and Śrīnatha, enough is enough.

Is a Nala story necessarily about Nala and Damayanti? No. One of the most elaborate narratives in the entire Nala corpus is the Hindi *Ḍholā* epic, studied extensively by Susan Wadley (2004, this volume). Large parts of this text recapitulate elements from other Nala versions, but the story is mostly about Nala's first wife Motini, and his son Dhola and the son's wife Maru. While the story of Nala and Damayanti provides the center section of the epic, its rural audiences often favor the sections on the goddess-like wife Motini, while to the west in Rajasthan Nala appears only as the father of Dhola, with no story of his own.

Can we have a Nala story that doesn't even mention Nala? Yes. Kirin Narayan (1997) has collected a Pahari tale that most listeners would recognize as close to Nala's. Nala's name, however, does not appear.

So perhaps we have something like the folklorist's beloved tale-type, for example, the "Cinderella" story that may have nothing to do with any prototypical or eponymous Cinderella. But the tale-type, if it exists, which is doubtful, has recognizable contours, at least in the folklorist's mind. The Nala corpus of variously configured tales definitely does not belong to a single tale-type; nor are the narrative contours stable enough to allow for identification along such lines.

The story fits itself with amazing versatility into a vast range of contexts and intentions—to such an extent that we cannot even determine what the narrative skeleton might be, outside context and intention. In Chhattisgarh, Damayanti stands alone on the dusty road, deserted by Nala, as a Pandvani heroine (Flueckiger, this volume). In Lindsey Harlan's and Ann Gold's Rajasthani versions (this volume), the tale is a woman's *vrat-kathā*, with all the ritual components and wishes that this genre requires. Faizi's (1982) Mughal version in Persian looks like a meditation, even an allegory, on the historical conditions of Mughal kingship under Akbar (Alam and Subrahmanyam). The *Nala-vilāsa-nātaka*, composed in Gujarat, is a courtly drama with powerful meta-theatrical and aesthetic concerns: here Nala is restored to "himself" when he sees a troupe of actors performing his story at court. A drama is searching for its author. Pukalentippulavar's thirteenth-century Tamil version turns the story into a form of music—subsuming the narrative within this metrical form, which has its own autonomous meaning, and in effect structuring the entire plot in accordance with this particular rhythmic mode. The *Naiṣadhacarita* of Śrīharṣa (1965) is an extended, complex, highly lyrical essay on love and language.

Will the real Nala story please stand up?

Still, the question remains. How can we identify with any confidence a particular text or story—such as all those discussed in this volume—as a Nala text? How do we know? The fact that we do know seems to be given. When, some years ago, we held a panel on Nala versions at the Wisconsin South Asia Conference in Madison, a large room

full of scholars who had lived and worked in many parts of South Asia had no difficulty identifying the topic. Their responses, in fact, were often moving and exciting. "In my village," one would say, from one corner of the large room "they tell the Nala story like this...." "But in mine it is completely different," someone else would break in, from another corner. A concert of richly contrapuntal voices. Everyone seemed to know what, or whom, we were talking about.

Perhaps, then, we need to think in terms of frames or themes. Perhaps it is not the content of the story but the common frame that determines its recognition. The frame may very well be empty. Or it may contain some stable thematic elements that we readily identify with Nala, and that can flexibly adapt to changing contexts.

There are problems with this hypothesis, as one can see the moment one attempts to formulate a theme with any certainty. Not the dice-game, nor its particular blend of determinacy and freedom, nor the riddles embedded in the text, nor the anxieties about Kali, nor the training of horses, nor the agonies of loving, nor any of various other prominent elements are universally present in the set of all possible or attested Nala narratives. Still, we may be getting a little closer to a partial answer.

Something inherent in the story, wherever we find it, has been inherited by the individual narratives. Our experience in Madison has something to teach us. You need an audience to recognize the story just as Nala needs Damayanti to recognize him. Without her, he has no identity of his own. Without the audience, the Nala narratives do not exist as such. The story, that is, constitutes something of a riddle. It needs to be answered or deciphered or identified as such.

Riddling is a process, and the riddle contains its own instructions for decipherment. There is a block through which the riddle has to find his or her way, apparently using the hints made available in the linguistic frame. The process requires at least two players. It is inherently dialogic, ludic, and usually rich in existential content.

For most riddle cultures, prior knowledge of the answer is required to resolve the riddle. The answer preexists and is not, contrary to popular notions about the riddle, logically derived

(Hasan-Rokem and Shulman 1996). Identification is a matter of knowing. Nala may know the answer to the riddle he constitutes, but he cannot use or become the answer without Damayanti. The interactive exchange is necessary and creative, laying down a field of force within which an identity can emerge. The answer cannot come out into reality unless the riddle is posed.

The Nala narrative cannot emerge unless someone tells it to someone else, recognizing it as such. Put differently, Nala has a question mark for a self. Or he is packaged as a question. There is, within Nala, an answer waiting for a question, or a space waiting to be filled. His "self," in this light, is an enduring subject within this corpus. It shifts and flows and changes, moving in and out of disguise, in accordance with the narrative. There is a striking isomorphism between this supple self, this riddle or question, and the set of Nala narratives in which it plays itself out.

To state the matter in terms of framing: a Nala narrative builds an answer to a question or uncertainty posed by, or better, as the frame. The answer may weave itself into the question and retain all of the latter's uncertainty or indeterminacy. A possible analogy exists in the famous *Ṛg Veda* hymn (10.121) which ends each verse with the refrain, "*kasmai devāya haviṣā yajāmahe*," "to which god should we offer the oblation?" This looks like a good question. The Vedic exegetes, however, "solved" it by proclaiming that the god in question is the one named Ka, that is, "Who?" The answer is the question. Who is the god we worship. This becomes a declarative sentence, like the pregnant phrase, "There was a king named Nala."

Seen in this light, it makes no sense to ask how, or if, some lost Ur-Nala story produced the vast series of variants that we easily identify as belonging to this single corpus. The contrary is more likely to be true: this set of stories, constituted as a corpus, produced the empty, riddle-like Nala who would become their hero, just as it produces, each time, a Damayanti-like audience who can recognize this Nala when he appears—by the very expectation that he must appear. Recognition is the stuff of these stories, however reconfigured. Something of their immense popularity is grounded in this empty frame. Each audience finds its own Nala, and the

delight lies in the fulfillment of this game. There is a sense in which this mode of framing and expansion comprises one, rather central paradigm, among various others, for understanding the larger ecosystem of South Asian narratives.

We have used the notion of a field of force which opens up within a frame constituted as a question: Who is Nala? The riddling nature of the frame is replicated by the hero and heroine, themselves waiting to be recognized and deciphered. Each possible decipherment is sensitive to context—to social, ritual, generic, linguistic, and other matrices. But unlike the classic riddle, Nala and Damayanti have no single, preexisting answer, just as there is no answer to the more general frame-question, "What is the Nala story?" It is this isomorphism between the more abstract level of the frame and its specific realizations that defines the Nala family of stories. Another way to speak of the pattern, following Don Handelman (2005), is to posit so profound an interweaving or "braiding" of frame and content that it becomes impossible to distinguish the frame as such. In this case, Nala and Damayanti always actualize the riddling process by a context-sensitive emerging into or becoming the people this context demands.

Perhaps we have to get used to the notion of a kind of narrative in which the semantic dimension is heavily underdetermined. In such narratives, plot itself is extremely flexible and supple. Such stories resist grammaticalization as a single, common genre, although each story will have its own grammar and internal logic. Once again, the freedom that each individual story has to follow its own semantics precludes any attempt to reduce the set as a whole to a primary Ur-narrative. This is a pattern that obtains in many Indian narrative traditions, although the Nala group is perhaps its most extreme embodiment. Such a pattern militates against the European philologist's inherited instinct to search for a lost or hidden original text, whether this means the earliest written text (the author's autograph, if possible) or a reconstructed narrative scheme extrapolated out of the available "variants." Much damage has been done to our understanding of the literary and textual traditions by insisting on the existence of a pristine, originary moment that is

corrupted, expanded, and otherwise traduced in the course of transmission. Phylogenetic models must be applied with great care, if at all, to Indian textual traditions.

So the commonality commonly assigned to the various "Nala stories" may be a post facto result emanating from different degrees of intertextual relations, the resonances and echoes one hears as one moves across genres and linguistic boundaries. It is this harmonic intertextuality that actually delimits the field—again, in a post facto manner. In all probability, texts such as the *Mahābhārata* fit such a model. Here the allegedly original narrative "core" perhaps emerges later, out of the interaction of many diverse materials. This core is retrojected backwards as a possible or even necessary beginning. Such a process also generates a frame suited to this development: Vyasa dictates the *Mahābhārata* text to Ganapati. The frame invents an author and a genealogy that harmonize the heterogeneity of the preexisting materials and impose a theoretical semantic coherence (actually not there). In such a process, the supposed point of origin is actually the last stage in the development of the text, which is sucked backwards or inwards toward this magnetic moment.

Yet intuitively we feel—like all the scholars who have joined the enterprise of searching for Nala in this volume—that there is, in fact, something somewhat more compelling that binds the Nala narratives together. We can always cite the Wittgensteinian notion of family resemblance—yet we still want to know what resembles what.

We may, then, have to revert to the *Rashomon* model, an alternative to the purely intertextual and post-facto theory. Something did happen. All the existing narratives point to this simple fact. But we have no access to what actually happened except through the individual retellings. The core, as we have said, is by definition unknowable. By the same token, it is infinitely generative. Story after story leaps again into the space of the riddle.

Is there anything more substantial that we can say about this mysterious core that imparts a sense of precarious unity, or that allows us to recognize a Nala story as such? Perhaps not, apart from the particular isomorphism of questioning frame and questioned hero that we have suggested. Nonetheless, it is perhaps possible to

address the huge popularity of the Nala stories by isolating branches or streams within the corpus and relating them to certain primary cultural patterns or themes prevalent in the communities where such stories are told.

For example, one cluster of stories, widely represented, focuses on recurrent attack by external forces upon the individual or the family. We see this clearly in the Rajasthani versions cited by Lindsey Harlan and Ann Gold in this volume, but also in the *Mahābhārata* version and the Tamil *kāvya* by Pukalentippulavar. Implicit in these narratives is a view of the world as requiring constant vigilance and protection, in particular in relation to safe boundaries. Any relaxation in attention or ritual activity may allow the boundary to be broken; it is enough for one small point to give in for an entire family world to collapse. When Nala forgets to wash a single spot on his foot—where a tiny air bubble prevented contact between skin and water, in some Telugu versions—Kali enters his body and his fortune is ruined. Here the woman's role may be particularly critical, as the *vrat-kathā* materials from Rajasthan consistently suggest. Integrity of self, home, and life itself depends on the integrity of the boundary. Some of these Nala stories are cautionary tales, whereas others explore the potential meaning of the experiences of invasion and possession. Issues of luck—perhaps in contrast to fate—arise here in connection with figures such as Dasa Mata, the goddess who can assure good luck to those who worship her correctly.

Another set of stories, cutting through genre divisions, celebrates the notion of humanness. Damayanti chooses Nala, the mortal man, in preference to the gods and remains faithful to this choice, which also requires repeated acts of recognition. In Śrīharṣa's Sanskrit *kāvya*, *Naiṣadhacarita*, as well as many regional-language *kāvyas* such as Pukalentippulavar's in Tamil, Śrīnatha's in Telugu, and, it seems, the Malayalam *Bhāṣā-Naiṣadha Campu* discussed by Rich Freeman (this volume), this depth of human experience is playfully mapped out in a range of contexts, moods, and fantasies. Central to this range is the erotic domain, where humanness comes most fully into its own in an interactive and creative manner. There seems to be almost no limit to the inventiveness of human modes of loving as

explored by these poets. In such texts, being human also presupposes anxiety about identity and integrity of the self in relation to others and to the field of metaphysical forces within which the human being must act. Here not luck but fate, sometimes condensed into the dice game, emerges as a major theme—not in the Sanskrit *Naiṣadhīya*, but in the *Naḷa-vĕṇpā* and the [Jain] texts discussed by Phyllis Granoff (this volume). The very name of this hero, Nala, may well be a transform of *nara*, "man," (Biardeau 1984) so that this becomes the story of being human in all its implications. In this sense, the open-ended, riddle-like structure that we have outlined reflects the rooted ambiguities of being human—perhaps the deepest riddle. On these grounds alone we may begin to understand the immense spread and popularity of this story in India.

Another subset uses the Nala frame to compose essays on human love and on the existential potential that love sparks or contains. The Pandvani narratives analyzed by Joyce Flueckiger (this volume) explicitly thematize this notion (sometimes in relation to other authoritative texts such as Tulsidas' *Rāmcaritmānas*). A particularly inventive and somewhat exotic meditation on the force of erotic love or desire—*'ishq*—is articulated in Faizi's Persian *Nal-Daman* (Alam and Subrahmanyam, this volume). Here it is not the menace of external forces but rather the consuming internalized fire of sexual passion, in relation to other internal vectors, that occupy the heroes and all who hear their story. For all its Islamic coloring and embedded Sufi metaphysics, Faizi's *masnavī* is immediately recognizable as another Nala story.

None of these thematic clusters—and there are others—are merely technical configurations. They can all be carried along or subsumed by the pliant frames the Nala materials inhabit or produce. None of them exhausts the expressive potential of these narratives in their remarkable range and generativity. None of them tells us what "Nala" really is.

The Story of Nala[1]

David Shulman • Velcheru Narayana Rao

The storyteller said to Saunaka and the other sages:

The wise Brhadasva came to visit Dharmaraja in the forest. After the king honoured him and gave him rest, he spoke to Brhadasva about the troubles he had suffered at the hands of his unjust enemies. Then the king asked: "Has anyone ever gone through what I am going through, after losing a whole kingdom and my relatives, living as I am in the company of animals in the wilderness?"

Brhadasva replied:

"Right here, in this forest, you have your godlike brothers, Brahmins, even a few chariots, and you are living here because of your devotion to what is right. But once there was another king called Nala, who played dice with his brother Puskara, lost his wealth, and lived in misery in the forest—all alone."

"Tell me more," said Dharmaraja. So Brhadasva commenced the story:

"Nala was the son of Virasena. He had many battalions, and he loved to play dice. He conquered all other kings. He also honoured Brahmins. As he was ruling the land of Nisadha, elsewhere, in Vidarbha, there was a king called Bhima, who had no children. He performed a penance, and when a sage called Damana arrived, he and his wife served him well and were rewarded by a boon—the birth of daughter named Damayanti, and three sons—Dama, Danta, and Damana. The girl, Damayanti, was endowed with

Reprinted from *Classical Telugu Poetry: An Anthology*. By Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman. Published by Oxford University Press, 2004.

fabulous beauty and a good character. A hundred women, lovely as goddesses, attended her.

People spoke to Damayanti about Nala's excellent qualities, and to Nala about Damayanti's. Both of them became unsettled by love, working in the heart. One day Nala, unable to contain his desire, his mind full of Damayanti, went out to a garden near the women's quarters of the palace. A line of geese, like a necklace spread through the sky, descended to earth. He watched them, and smiled; he ran after them and caught one, before it could fly away.

The other geese, unwilling to desert their friend, flew in circles, wailing, above him, like pieces of white autumn clouds blown by the wind. Thinking that the king might hurt him, the goose that was caught spoke in a human voice: "Sir, I will do you a favour. I know you're in love with Damayanti. I'll go to her and describe you in such a way that she will never think of any other man. I'll make her firm in her love for you."

The words were music to Nala's ears. He was pleased, and let the goose go. The flock flew off to Vidarbha, where they found Damayanti, surrounded by her friends, playing in a garden. When they saw the geese, the girls were excited and started to chase them, each girl targeting a single goose—and the one Nala had released to be a messenger and matchmaker managed to get itself caught by Damayanti. It spoke in charming, human tones, pleasing to Damayanti: "I have just come from the man you love, from Nala. There is no king on this earth, from one end of the ocean to the other, whom I have not seen personally. Not one of them comes close to Nala. Unless you become Nala's wife, it will all be wasted—your incredible beauty, your grace, your loveliness, your high birth, and your good luck. You're a jewel of a woman, and he's a jewel of a man. Your union will enhance both of you."

Damayanti was happy to hear this:

"You have told me about him, how fine he is,
how good. Now go tell him about me.
You know me.
Be kind."

So the goose returned to Nala.

Both lovers, burning with desire,
survived long days and nights
with the help of cool gardens, lotus leaves
and their tender stalks, dust of camphor,
beds of flowers, cool showers,
and layer after layer of sandal paste.

Just from hearing about one another, they fell deeply in love. Seeing how pale Damayanti had become in her longing, her girlfriends were alarmed and told her father, Bhima, the whole story. "She keeps thinking over the words of that goose. She stares in the direction it flew away. She doesn't talk to her friends. She just sits around, exhausted, without a word, day after day. She's lost all interest in ornaments, amusements, comfortable beds, and other pleasures. And she can't fall asleep, by day or by night. Her mind is dwelling on a prince called Nala. She is tormented by desire. She won't hear of any other princes, no matter how remarkable they might be."

Bhima thought: "What can I do? What is the best way to bring Nala here?" He realized that his daughter had come of age. So he invited all the kings of the world to Damayanti's *svayamvara*, the ceremony where she would choose a bridegroom.

They all came. The earth quivered under the impact of their armies and chariots. At that time, two sages, Parvata and Narada, arrived in Indra's world after travelling through the earth. Indra welcomed them and asked how things were going, down below. "Why," he asked, "are no good kings coming here these days to enjoy the endless pleasures of my world after being killed in battle?" Narada explained: "There is a woman, Damayanti, more beautiful than all others...among human beings and all kinds of gods. Her *svayamvara* is taking place now—a rare event. All the kings are getting ready to go there, so they've stopped fighting. They're even friendly to one another."

Indra and the other rulers of space naturally wanted to see this for themselves, so they got into their flying chariots, studded with

gold and jewels, and headed for earth. They encountered Nala, already on his way to the *svayamvara*. He was more brilliant than Visnu, a veritable twin to the Love-God. They parked their chariots in the sky and climbed out on to the earth. "King of Nisadha: you have vowed only to speak the truth. We would like you to be a messenger for us, to help us."

Quickly he consented. "I'll do whatever you say. Just tell me who you are, and what my mission is."

The king of gods said: "I am Indra. These are the other rulers of space. You know about them. We have come to this world for Damayanti's *svayamvara*. Tell her about us and praise us, by name. If you do so, she will surely choose one of us."

Nala bowed. "You know very well that I am going there for the same purpose. Is it fair for you to ask me to do a job like this?"

"Then why did you get all excited and promise to do it? Is it right not to keep your word? We know we can rely on your honesty. You are the right person for this. We need a messenger. This is the gods' mission. You have to do it. Don't worry about how you will get into that palace, which is heavily guarded with armed men. No one will stop you when you enter."

So Nala went to Vidarbha alone, unafraid, and entered Damayanti's dwelling. He saw her

still more beautiful than the goose
had led him to believe. A hundred women, radiant
as goddesses, sat around her as she listened,
insatiate, to them talking about *him*—
her only comfort.

Nala was transfixed. All the other women, looking at him, wondered: "Where did this unusual man come from?" They stood up to welcome him, flustered, delighted.

Damayanti saw him, too—handsome as the god of love, and just like Indra, brilliant as the Sun, gentle as the Moon, remarkably similar to Varuna, akin to Kubera, equal to the Asvins. Love inspired her; she cast off shyness and fearlessly spoke to the prince in soft, singing tones. "You are no ordinary person. Why did you come here,

and how did you get in? This palace is impenetrable, controlled by my fearsome father. How could you slip in without anyone noticing? Tell me about yourself. I can't bear it anymore."

Nala said, "Young woman, I am here on behalf of the gods. My name is Nala. Indra, Kubera, Varuna, and Yama, the gods of space, are coming to see your *svayamvara;* they sent me ahead as their messenger. I am ordered to request you to choose one of them, according to your desire. This will please them all. This is the favour they asked of me. Because they sent me, I was able to enter unnoticed. Do what they want."

She bent her head. This was the woman who had already heard about Nala from the goose, and who was deeply in love with him, and in pain. Now that she recognized him, her mind was terribly hurt by his words.

"Indra and the others are gods. I always
bow to them, but I belong
to you. Ever since I heard of you
from that bird, I have held you
in my heart. The whole crowd of kings
from all over the world was invited here
just to bring you. Have a heart, try to think of yourself
as my husband.

If you can't do this, I will have to kill myself with a rope, with poison, or in fire or water."

Nala said:

"They are strong. They rule the universe.
Great in glory, ablaze with flame.
And they are gods. They want you.
I'm not worth the dust of their feet.
I'm human, caught in the cycle
of lives. When the gods want
to show you favour, why would you
want a man?

Making the gods angry brings misery to men. Please them, do as they want, and you'll be saving me, too."

Big tears were rolling down Damayanti's cheeks. She thought for a long moment. "I think I've found a way," she said, "that will be safe. If Indra and the other rulers of space come to my *svayamvara,* I will choose you for my husband in their presence. That way there is no blame."

So Nala went back to the gods and reported what Damayanti said. Then, at the auspicious day and hour, the *svayamvara* began.

"So she won't choose anyone but Nala?
Let's see," said the gods to themselves,
and came there, all four of them,
in Nala's form.

With a garland of white lotus blossoms in her graceful hands, Damayanti entered the assembly and surveyed the line of kings who had come there to see her. The four gods along with Nala were standing there, all exactly alike. She couldn't tell which one of them was Nala, couldn't separate him from the rest. Agitated at heart, filled with doubt, she prayed to the gods, crying out in her mind: "Gods, show me the way to know Nala. Assume your own forms."

The gods heard her cry. In compassion, they stood together, unblinking, unsweating, their feet not quite touching the ground. And while these rulers of space and all the princes of the world were watching, Damayanti selected Nala, of untarnished fame, for her husband, in accordance with the rule, by placing the fragrant garland on his neck.

The gods approved. The Brahmins blessed. Music rang out like the unending roar of the ocean. Nala happily married Damayanti, won at this unprecedented *svayamvara.* And the gods praised him and gave him boons: Indra promised to be present in his own form at Nala's ritual performances, to accept the god's share; Agni and Varuna promised him fire and water wherever he might need them; Yama, who is Dharma, promised that Nala's mind would always incline toward what is right; Kubera promised him inexhaustible wealth. Then they headed back toward heaven, when they saw, coming toward them, Kali,[2] accompanied by Dvapara. Indra asked: "What is this? Where are you going?"

Kali replied, "I heard that a *svayamvara* for Damayanti had been scheduled. I'm on my way there, hoping to be chosen by her as her husband."

They all laughed. "Everything is over. That woman rejected everybody and married a man called Nala." Kali was infuriated. He decided then and there to make Nala and Damayanti lose their kingdom and suffer the pains of separation from one another. He knew that Nala loved dice, so he sent Dvapara to enter the dice. Kali himself could not enter Nala, because the king was protected by all the sacrifices and gifts he had made and all the offerings and prayers and other good deeds he had performed. For a long time he waited for his chance.

One day, Nala said the morning prayer before washing. This was Kali's opportunity: he penetrated him. He also went to Puskara and said, "Play dice with Nala, and you will take all his wealth, and the kingdom." Then Kali took the form of a Brahmin, to help this happen. With dice in hand, and Puskara in tow, he sought out Nala and said, "Play a game of dice with our king." Nala felt it was not right to refuse this invitation, so he began to play.

And to lose. Wagering all he had. But he played on, defeated, yet unexhausted. His friends tried to stop him, but, hit by Kali from inside, he wouldn't listen. For months he played, obsessed, betting all of his possessions, all his vehicles. As he was on the verge of losing them all, his subjects, ministers, and Brahmins came to him, sending Damayanti ahead, in the hope of stopping him. But he turned them away, possessed as he was by Kali, so they were able to say nothing.

Then Damayanti thought:
"The more you lose, the more you
want to play. You grow stubborn.
What can I do? This is the start
of evil."

She was grieving, certain that the dice were in Puskara's power and that Nala had no control over them, and that disaster was in store. With the permission of her husband and of the ministers, priest,

and relatives who were close to her, she sent for a driver named Varsneya, and told him to take her two children—Indrasena, the little boy, and Indrasena, the young girl—to Vidarbha, and to leave them there with her relatives.

When the kingdom itself had been lost, and everything else, Nala left the city together with Damayanti, destitute of all regal cover. For three days, they lived outside the town. No one came to see him, by order of the new king, Puskara, whose mind was filled with the hostility that comes from that game, under Kali's influence. He was worthy of every honour, and now entirely dishonoured. Their only food for those three days was water. Unable to bear the pangs of hunger, he noticed some golden birds moving in front of him, and, thinking they would serve as food, tried to catch them by throwing at them the cloth he was wearing. They flew off with it into the sky, laughing. Looking down at Nala, now naked, they said: "We are the dice that tricked you out of your possessions and your kingdom. We took the form of birds and came here to strip you of your clothes." And they flew away.

Nala was amazed. All this, he realized, was due to his weakness for dice. He covered himself with the end of Damayanti's sari. So they had only one piece of cloth between them. They looked at one another in dismay. Nala said, "The road goes south. This one goes to Vidarbha. This one to Kosala and that one to Ujjayini. Which shall we take? But you should not suffer with me in the wilderness. Go to your relatives."

She was choked with tears. "Let's go together to Vidarbha. We can be happy there. Why should we go into this treacherous forest, full of cruel animals?"

Nala said, with bowed head, "As you say, the kingdom of Vidarbha is our kingdom, too. When I went there before, I was a rich king; I made all our family happy. How can I go there now, totally destitute?"

Damayanti answered, "For one afflicted with grief, the best medicine is a wife. A man who is together with his wife won't be affected by calamity when it comes. When you are exhausted, hungry or thirsty, a wife will know and take care of you. She will rescue you

from all grief. Don't think of me merely as dependent upon you, or a tag-along, to be pitied. Don't leave me. Let me come with you."

Nala consoled her. "Yes. I will do this. How could I leave you, who are dear to me as life itself? Don't worry." Together, they walked on and on, until they came to some resting-place[3] in the middle of that empty wilderness. They rested there, lying on the hard, grey, dusty ground. Nala closed his eyes, worn by the journey, but, in his misery, he couldn't fall asleep. He stood up, looking at Damayanti, who was sleeping, exhausted, at his feet. "My enemies have stolen my kingdom and my wealth. Everyone has deserted me—my friends and subjects. Here I am, wandering in the wilderness with my wife. She was used to sleeping on a soft bed, while many maids skilfully massaged her feet; now she is sleeping in this hard and dusty place. She is suffering because she married me, through the working of fate. I can't bear to see her suffer. I'll go away somewhere. When she finds me gone, she'll go to her relatives and live without grief."

He had decided to leave. Without waking her, he tore her sari in half, covered himself, and went a little way. But he couldn't cut his bond to Damayanti, so he came back. The Kali in him wanted to leave her, but the husband in him was unwilling to leave his wife, because of their long-standing love. Nala was bound by the ropes of confusion. He was like a swing that goes back and forth. He couldn't decide for a long time, but finally, pulled by Kali, he ruthlessly abandoned her. He didn't even think about what would happen if he left this young woman a prey to the forest.

Later, Damayanti awoke and discovered that her husband was gone and her sari cut in two. In a panic, she looked everywhere. "Where are you, O great king of Nisadha, punisher of your foes? Could you be so devoid of kindness that you have left me? You never strayed from the right path, never told a lie. You told me not to worry. Is it right to forget your promise? If you are hiding in a bush nearby, show yourself to me. Why are you so cruel to me? Where can I go? How can I find you in this terrible wilderness? All the learning in the Vedas and Vedic sciences is not worth one word of truth. You said you loved me like your life and would never leave me. Keep your word."

She was babbling on and on. But she wasn't worried about her own loneliness, or her helplessness as a woman, or the dangers that lurked at every step—thorns, animals, snakes—as much as she was worried about the helplessness of her husband and his hunger, thirst, and weariness. She was tired. Every birdcall startled her. She sought refuge from the blazing sun in the shade of the trees. And there were bears and tigers. She was crying, kicking her way through thickets, trying to avoid the thorns. She was scared, searching for a path somewhere, stumbling.

Suddenly, at her feet, a hungry boa appeared and grabbed her. She couldn't move, paralyzed with fear. "Help me, now, husband," she screamed. "Can you hear?" A hunter heard her scream and came running. With his knife, he cut off the boa's head. He consoled Damayanti, who now appeared like the moon when it emerges from the serpent Rahu's clutches. He led her to a pool where she could bathe and fed her sweet wild fruits. Then he asked who she was, and why she had come to this forest all alone. She told him her story, in her melodious voice.

Her face was glowing like the moon,
her hair black. She was every bit a princess,
graceful in her walk, her body fragrant
and luminous, her eyes wide as the lotus petal.
The hunter saw her, and the sharp pain of desire
split his heart. So he told her,
unblemished as she was.

Her character was pure, like blazing fire that you can't reach or touch or even bear to see. But this rather crude hunter wanted her, without any second thoughts. He was soon to die. Damayanti looked at him with anger and spoke a curse: "If I am true to my husband, let this evil hunter die." At that very second, like a tree burnt by fire, he fell dead.

By the power that lies in faithfulness, and holding in her heart the image of her tiger of a husband, the young woman moved through the forest, no longer afraid of poisonous snakes, tigers, and other cruel animals. She was still searching for him, calling him at every tree, peeping into every cave.

She came upon a hermitage of sages who lived on water, or leaves, or simply on the wind, or on roots and wild rice. They were dwelling, intent upon their strenuous discipline, at the foot of trees. It was a stroke of luck, earned by her good deeds in a former life, that she found that settlement of sages on the bank of a holy river, right in the midst of the wilderness infested by beasts, snakes, thieves and hunters. As soon as she saw them, she bowed. They were surprised to see her and asked: "Who are you? Are you the goddess of this forest? Or a goddess from heaven? Why are you roaming around, radiant with light?"

She answered: "I am Nala's wife. He must be known to you as Punya-śloka, the famous patron of many great rituals. I'm the one they call Damayanti. Driven by fate, my husband got separated from me and went off somewhere or other. I'm looking for him all over this wilderness. I'm sure he must have come here to receive your blessings. Tell me where he went from here, if you know. If I don't see him within a few days, I will kill myself." She wept, and they felt pity.

"You will see him again in a few days. That good man will rule his kingdom as before. We know this through our inner vision. Don't grieve." Then they disappeared, just like that, along with their sacrificial fires, the trees and flowers and the river, the whole lovely place. She was left wondering if it was a dream. She went on and came upon a caravan. The travellers stared at her: her hair dishevelled, dusty, dry, her lean body covered only by half of a dirty sari, she looked like a crazy woman who never ate or drank or slept. Some of them ran away in fear, taking her for a ghoul. Some laughed at her. "What are you looking for in this forest?" they asked. Others bowed to her, calling her a goddess.

"How lucky," she thought, "that deep in the forest I have found a large caravan of travellers," and she said to them: "I am Nala's wife. I lost track of my husband: my bad luck. I am roaming this forest all alone. Have you, perhaps, seen him—that compassionate man, who looks like a god?"

The leader of the caravan was named Suci. He said to her, "No Nala in this forest—only elephants, tigers, bears. This is no place for people. Not even the sun's rays enter here." She asked him where

the caravan was going, and he told her they were on their way to the city of Subahu, lord of the Cedis. She asked if she could join them. So they took her along. She was longing for the sight of her husband and thinking over what the sages had said.

They walked as far as they could until it became too hot, then rested near the cool waters of a pond. They were thirsty. In the middle of the night, a whole herd of elephants came there to drink, like a host of clouds descending on the ocean to absorb its water. The travellers who were deep in sleep were trampled to death under the elephants' feet. Some were pierced by their tusks. Some ran, yelling in terror, and climbed trees. The caravan as a whole broke and scattered, like the wealth of an evil man.

But Damayanti survived. She thought to herself, "Fate may be mindless. It killed all these people who were sleeping peacefully. They were crying out for life. I really want to die but fate forgot to kill me. I was thinking that I could go with this caravan and escape the suffering of the forest, but this herd of elephants has left the caravan in shambles. Perhaps I did some evil act in a previous body. Or maybe the gods didn't forgive me for choosing Nala at the *svayamvara*, rejecting them in their face. Their anger may be the reason for this painful separation."

When the sun came up, the survivors, together with Damayanti in her misery, went on. After a long journey, they came to the city of the Cedi king. As Damayanti was walking down the main street, thronged with people, the Queen-Mother saw her from her balcony. Though she was exhausted and lustreless like the crescent moon dimmed by daylight, she was still very beautiful. The Queen-Mother said to her maid: "Have a look at that woman, with her soiled and frayed sari and her hair grey with dust. She looks like the Goddess of Good Luck disguised as a crazy woman. I feel something for her. Bring her here."

The maid brought Damayanti to the Queen-Mother, who asked her: "Who do you belong to? Why do you seem to be crazed with grief? Tell me."

Damayanti answered: "My husband, who conquered all his enemies, gambled and lost. I followed him into exile, like his shadow.

But when I was sleeping, unawares, I lost him, tortured as he was by hunger. Fate allowed this. Since then, I have been watching for him. He was wearing a single piece of cloth, but he is handsome and noble. I have taken the *sairandhri* vow.[4] Burning with the fire of loss, I have been wandering in the forest, living on fruits and roots, sleeping wherever sunset finds me, with animals for my companions." Tears falling on her breasts, turned dust to mud. She said nothing more.

The Queen-Mother consoled her. "Stay with me. I will send Brahmins to look for your husband."

Damayanti replied, "I will keep my vow. I won't eat any food that has been touched by others. I won't wash others' feet. I won't speak with other men, except for the Brahmins who will be sent to search for my husband. If you accept these terms, I will stay with you. Otherwise, no." The Queen-Mother was pleased and said, "As you like." She entrusted her with the care of her daughter, Sunanda. So Damanayti stayed in the Cedi city with the title "Sairandhri." In her heart, she was thinking of Nala, and she was tormented by his absence.

Meanwhile, Nala had proceeded deeper into the forest after leaving Damayanti. He came upon a wildfire, consuming huge trees, shooting sparks into the sky. From within it came a desperate voice: "King, come and save me. Hurry." He didn't hesitate. He rushed into the raging fire and found a snake coiled up in distress. The snake made obeisance and said, "My name is Karkotaka. Through the power of karma, I once disobeyed a Brahmin, and he cursed me, so I cannot move. Fire is engulfing me on all sides. I don't want to die. Take me, lord, to some cool lakeshore. Have mercy. If you save me, I will do you a favour."

Nala lifted him; as he did so, the snake became light and small as a thumb. Nala rushed with him to the edge of a lake, where he let him go. "Walk ten paces more," said the snake, "and I will give you something good." So Nala walked, counting as he did so, and as he uttered "Ten," the snake bit him.[5] At once Nala lost his own form and became ugly. Karkotaka showed him his own true form and said, "Don't be sorry that I bit you. It is not good for you to be recognized by others. That is why I have made you deformed. As

long as my poison is in your body, you will be safe from poisonous snakes, demons, ghouls, and all enemies. You will ultimately win all battles, be reunited with your wife, and enjoy your kingdom as before. The moment you want to resume your own form, just think of me. This piece of cloth will come back to you. When you put it on, you will get your own body back. For now, you should go to the Iksvaku king, Rtuparna, and work for him. Teach him the skills you have, the Heart of Horses (*asva-hṛdaya*), and learn from him the Heart of the Dice (*aksa-hṛdaya*).[6] Tell him your name is Bahuka, and serve him as his charioteer."[7] Karkotaka advised him thus, and disappeared.

Nala followed his advice and went to Rtuparna. "I am Bahuka. A good trainer of horses and also a good cook. And I have many other skills. I came to work for you." Rtuparna said, "If you want to stay with me, you must train my horses to run fast." Nala agreed. He became the master of Rtuparna's stables. He tamed his wild horses and taught the other ones new tricks. He also cooked delicious meals. As his assistants he had two of Rtuparna's employees—Varsneya and Jivala. But Nala remained in disguise.

One evening, when he thought he was alone, he was thinking about Damayanti, conjuring up her appearance. "Where have you gone my splendid princess? Did someone trap you in the forest? Have you been swallowed by some fearsome animal prowling for prey? Or are you at your parents' house, or in some other country?" Love overpowered him. All night long he tossed and turned, sleepless, sighing.

Jivala overheard his lament. "No woman could find any use for this dwarf with stubby arms and a crooked body—and yet he is tormented by desire. He has love for women in his heart. The woman he's thinking of—must be as pretty as him."[8] He came up to Bahuka and asked, "How did you get separated from the wife you're thinking about?"

Bahuka said, "People will laugh at me if I even mention a wife, let alone being separated from one. I don't know how or why, but some soldier called Dull-Wit became separated from his wife. He looked for her everywhere but couldn't find her, so he used to babble

on like this. I'm just imitating him."[9] That was the way Nala hid himself in Ayodhya, under the name of Bahuka.

When the King of Vidarbha, Damayanti's father, heard that Nala had fallen from his kingdom, he grieved: "Where have my daughter and son-in-law gone? Where are they now?" So he sent trusted Brahmin scholars, impeccable in their conduct, to search for them. Honouring them, he promised them a thousand gold coins if they found out where Nala and Damayanti were—and thousands of cows and villages if they actually brought them back. The Brahmins searched through the whole world, all the villages, towns and cities, in many countries. One of them, named Sudeva, went to the city of Subahu, the Cedi king. He entered the palace together with the local Brahmins in their morning routine of declaring the day auspicious. There, in the women's quarters, he saw a woman in the company of the princess Sunanda. She was covered in dust, like a fire enveloped in smoke, or like the moon hidden by dark clouds, or like a lotus sunk in the mud. She wasn't easily identifiable, but he scrutinized her forehead, searching for a tiny mark between her eyebrows; that was how he recognized her as Damayanti. He thought to himself, "Without her husband, she is like a dried-up river, or a lotus-pond with no lotuses. Not as radiant any more, though she still radiates faithfulness. A husband's devotion is the only real decoration for a woman. It can't be stolen or dimmed. When will she come together with her husband again, like the star Rohini when she joins the moon? When will my king have the joy of seeing those two together, perfectly matched as they are in age, beauty, birth and qualities?"

He addressed Damayanti: "Woman, your parents, your children, and your other relatives are safe. But they have been worried about you, not knowing where you were. Now the anxiety will end. I am Sudeva, a friend of your brother. Your father, the king, has sent out many Brahmins in search of you. By my good luck, I came here and found you." She recognized him. She asked about her children, her parents, and her other relatives, one by one, as tears fell. Sunanda reported to the Queen-Mother that the Sairandhri was crying, for some unknown reason. The Queen-Mother hurried there, with all

the palace women. They found Damayanti and the Brahmin talking to one another. The Queen-Mother asked the Brahmin: "Sir, whose daughter is she? Whose wife? Why is she keeping these vows and why was she separated from her husband and family? How do you know her? Does she have a name?"

Sudeva replied: "My lady, she is the daughter of the Vidarbha king, and the wife of Nala, or Punya-śloka. When the king heard that she followed after her husband, who had lost his kingdom, he sent Brahmins to look for them. I came here and saw this woman in your care. She has a certain good-luck sign, shaped like a lotus, placed by the Creator himself between her eyebrows. I noticed it, though it was hidden by dust, and knew she was the princess." Sunanda washed Damayanti's face with water, and the mark showed up clearly, to everyone's amazement.

The Queen-Mother embraced her in joy. "You are my daughter," she said. "Your mother and I are sisters, daughters to the Dasarna king. She married the lord of Vidarbha, and I married Virabahu." Damayanti bowed respectfully to the Queen-Mother and took Sunanda into her arms.

She stayed there for a few more days. Finally, she said to the Queen-Mother: "Both this house and the other one are home to me. I am happy here or there. But I want to see my parents, my brothers, and my children. Permit me to go to Vidarbha." Subahu's mother sent her off on a golden chariot, attended by an army.

After arriving at Vidarbha, though she was now with her parents, she still refused all physical comforts. She still wore that soiled, old half-sari, and her body remained cloaked with dust. She kept to her vow, in the hope of seeing her husband again. She could hardly bear to go on living without him. One day, she went to her mother and said, in confidence, "Send somebody to look for Nala. He is the only one who can remove my grief. If I don't see him, I won't live in this world any longer."

Her mother told the king. He appointed trustworthy Brahmins to seek out Nala. Damayanti spoke to them before they left: "Nala, the king of Nisadha, is not fully himself.[10] Therefore, he might disguise

himself from others. Go from one court to another and recite the following words:

"You are a truthful man.
Was it right for you to leave your wife,
taking half her sari to cover yourself?
You made the law of husband and wife
into a lie. How can you be so unkind?
That good woman deserves compassion."

"Speak this everywhere. If anyone can't bear this accusation and tries to respond, you can assume that man is Nala. Tell him about me and bring him here. If he won't come, come and tell me where he is."

So they set off. In every royal court, they repeated the words Damayanti had taught them. They met with no response. But one Brahmin, called Parnada, reported: "I went to Ayodhya and spoke the words you gave me in the assembly of King Rtuparna. There was a man there with stubby arms who earns a salary of 100 gold coins from the king. He can ride fast, and he's a good cook. He's ugly. His name is Bahuka. He runs the stables. He called me aside. Pale and sighing heavily, he said,

"If there are faults in a man,
and his wife knows them in her heart
and accepts them, she'll get pleasure
from her man and the joy of doing right
in her next life."

That's all he said before he left.'

She thought it over a long time. "If he weren't Nala, why would he answer?" She wanted to send someone else, a little more skilled, so, with her parents' consent, she invited Sudeva. "Just as you found me out and brought me back, I want you to identify Nala and bring him here. You have that skill. Go, like a foreign Brahmin, to Ayodhya and look up the king Rtuparna. He's more radiant than the sun, and he rules Northern Kosala as the son of Bhangasara. He is almost

like a god. Tell him that Bhima, the king of Vidarbha, searched all over for Nala but couldn't find him, so he is now announcing a second *svayamvara* for Damayanti, at short notice. All the kings of the earth are on their way."

Sudeva went to Ayodhya and told Rtuparna that Damayanti's *svayamvara* was going to take place in one day's time. Rtuparna looked at Bāhuka. "I have to get to Vidarbha, for Damayanti's second *svayamvara,* within one day. This is the time for you to show your skill with horses."

"I'll do it," Nala said, grieving at heart. He was thinking, "She must be angry that I left her in the forest. Otherwise, why would she do this? If this is the case, men who think that women love them are fools. But she has children who love me. How can she do this to me? If I want to find the truth, I have to go there with Rtuparna."

Varsneya brought out the chariot, and Nala harnessed horses with lucky marks, swift as the wind. When Rtuparna came to the chariot, he noticed that the horses stumbled under the weight of the yoke. "How can these weak animals take us such a great distance?" he said. "Bring some others."

Bahuka replied, "Master, these horses can run like the wind. We'll reach Vidarbha today, before sunset." The king said, "If that is so, it will prove your deep understanding of horses. And I will return the favour." So Rtuparna mounted the chariot together with his assistant, Varsneya, and they set off. Whatever they could see far ahead of them suddenly loomed large, and then was left far behind. The Iksvaku king began to wonder if he was riding in the chariot of the sun, or if Nala was Anuru, the sun's own charioteer. Varsneya was also amazed: "Is this man Salihotra, or Matali, Indra's charioteer—or Nala, perhaps? Are there any other human kings who know how to handle horses like this? In age, in knowledge, and in nobility, he seems a little like Nala. But why has he taken this ugly shape? But then great men, driven by the gods, sometimes live in disguise. Is it possible to recognize them?"

As they went on, Rtuparna dropped his shawl. Looking back, he said to Bahuka, "Hey, slow down a little, so that Varsneya can go get my shawl." Bahuka smiled. "The place your shawl fell is already

miles away. Varsneya will never get it." And he spoke further about the virtues of speed. After passing through several other countries, they saw a *vibhītaka* tree with innumerable leaves and fruit on its branches. Rtuparna said to Bahuka, "Not everybody knows everything. Different people have different skills. I, for example, know the precise number of anything just by looking at it. I can tell you the exact number of leaves and fruit on that *vibhītaka* tree. See those two branches? The total number of leaves and fruit on them is 10,001. The rest of the branches have 2095."

Bahuka thought, "I have to count them, to be sure." So he stopped the chariot, got out and felled the tree. Then he counted all the leaves and fruit on those branches. They tallied precisely with Rtuparna's count. Amazed, he asked Rtuparna to teach him that skill.

The king said, "This art is known as the Heart of the Dice. A man who knows it as prescribed is expert in numbers, and free from evil, blame, and poison. He will become famous, loved by everybody." And he instructed Bahuka, willingly, as prescribed, without any crooked thoughts, and with a lucid mind. He was in a hurry to get to Vidarbha.

Nala[11] absorbed the Heart of the Dice and was satisfied. "I'll give you in exchange the Heart of the Horses. Take it," he said. "Keep it with you," said Rtuparna; "I'll take it when I need it." Now, because of the power of the Heart of the Dice, Kali, who had been occupying Nala's body up to this point, emerged from it, vomiting Karkotaka's poison. Shaking all over, he bowed to Nala and told him who he was. Nala was angry and wanted to curse him. Sensing this, Kali said: "Since entering you, I've been scorched continually by that snake's poison. I've suffered enough. Don't punish me more. From now on, people who praise you will be safe from me."

Nala was appeased, and Kali took himself to the *vibhītaka* tree. That tree is known, ever since, to be cursed. Nala was now free from all blemishes except for his physical form. With Rtuparna and Varsneya, he raced to Vidarbha. It was sunset when Rtuparna entered the city, with Bhima's permission, his chariot roaring through the streets like thunder. Damayanti heard the noise of the chariot and

was happy: "That must be Nala. I've found him at last—my king and lover. I would have died if I had to wait any longer." Then she caught sight of Rtuparna in that chariot, to her dismay.

Rtuparna went off to see Bhima, who welcomed him and settled him in a fine palace. But Rtuparna didn't even hear the word "*svayamvara*" mentioned anywhere in the city. He was perplexed. "No other kings have come here. Apparently Damayanti is not the kind of woman to marry another man." He was a bit embarrassed to be there.

Bahuka tied up the horses in the king's stables and was resting near the chariot. Damayanti noticed that Rtuparna had brought two men with him—Varsneya and Bahuka. She was not prepared to give up hope. She called a maid named Kesini and said, "I know two of them: Rtuparna, king of Ayodhya, and Varsneya, of the charioteer caste. But who is the third man, the one they call Bahuka? My heart feels something for him. He must be the man who responded to Parnada. Go to him and find out who he is."

Kesini went to Bahuka and said, "Damayanti has been asking about you. What brought you here?"

Bahuka said, "When Damayanti announced her second *svayamvara* and invited all the kings of the world, Rtuparna travelled all the way from Ayodhya in a single day. I came along as his driver—swift as thought." So who is the third man?' Kesini asked. "He's Nala's charioteer," said Bahuka. "They call him Varsneya. He's no small man." "Does he by any chance know where King Nala might have gone?" asked Kesini. Bahuka said, "Varsneya took Nala's children to Vidarbha. When he heard that Nala had lost his kingdom, he sought employment with Rtuparna. He wouldn't know Nala.

There are only two people who could know him—
the woman with eyes like a lotus,
Bhima's daughter, who went with him,
alone, and Nala himself.
Would anyone else have a way of knowing Nala?'

Kesini said: "Ever since her husband left her in the forest, without love, tearing off half her sari, Damayanti has been wearing the other

half; her body is dark with dust, her hair knotted and twined; she sleeps on the ground. This is the vow she keeps." Nala heard this and turned his head away, so that the tears welling up in his eyes could not be seen.

Kesini informed Damayanti about Bahuka's words and appearance. Now she was certain that he was Nala. She told Kesini: "Go back to him. I hear that he also cooks for Rtuparna. See what he does when he cooks." So Kesini watched him and saw some marvellous things that come to humans from the gods. She reported to Damayanti: "His deeds are beyond human beings. They look easy, though they were never seen or heard before. Ultimately, you have to speak of him in terms of the workings of god. If he throws a handful of grass, fire suddenly blazes up, and the cooking is done. No need for further fuel, it keeps on burning. When he looks for water to wash the meat, suddenly there are pots full of water, an unending supply. When he touches flowers with his hands, although they wilt, they never lose their fragrance. There is a great brilliance in him."

Damayanti sent Kesini to bring her some of the meat curries that Bahuka had cooked. She tasted them and knew: Bahuka bore the signs of Nala. Still not content, she sent her two children to Bahuka with Kesini. When he saw them, a flood of tears flowed from his eyes. He lifted them on to his lap and, his whole body thrilling, said to Kesini: "These two children are very like my own son and daughter. That is why I am holding them and crying." He was still holding himself. "If you keep coming and going, back and forth, people will imagine things," he said to her. "Don't come again, for any reason. We are guests from another country. Why bother with us?" So Kesini went back to Damayanti and reported. Damayanti was pleased and went to see her mother.

"There is no more reason to doubt.
If you examine all his qualities,
this Bahuka is Nala. It is certain.
My heart is leaping with Joy.
So tell me: is he going to come here,
or am I going to him? You decide."

The Queen consulted Bhima and arranged for Bahuka to be brought before Damayanti.

So he came. Before him stood a woman,
suffering written on her face, her body
bowed, covered with dust, emaciated
and weak. Nala looked at Damayanti
as she began to weep.

She saw his deformed body but would not treat him as another. She was beside herself with love, shyness, fear, and excitement, all mixed together. "There is no-one like Nala," she said, "who could leave a sleeping wife in the wilderness, the wife he had married before the fire, who was a good woman, devoted to him, and go off, with not a trace of tenderness in his heart. I had chosen him instead of the gods themselves, and I bore him children. Why would he leave me impulsively, cruelly? Did I do him any harm? Did I forget that he had promised never to leave me, because I was as dear to him as life itself? That he told me not to be afraid?" Tears flowed over her breasts as if to cool her burning heart.

Nala saw this and was stricken with grief. "My mind was possessed by Kali. That was why I had to suffer all these hardships. Now Kali has left me, because of my inner strength, and because my bad karma is spent. I came here for you. But let that go: I was devoted to you, full of love, and still you didn't think of me but went ahead and announced a second *svayamvara,* to look for another husband. No good woman would do that. Rtuparna came here because you had invited all the kings, right?"

Damayanti was taken aback. "Brahmins went everywhere in search of you and uttered the words I had given them. Among them, one called Parnada found you out, in Ayodhya, by your response. Once I knew about you from him, I thought of a strategy to bring you here. I sent Sudeva to announce to Rtuparna that my second *svayamvara* was to take place in a day's time. What human being can travel a hundred miles in a single day—other than Nala? That was my idea, if you really want to know. I had no evil thoughts. Don't think otherwise. I touch your feet. If ever I had such a thought,

the gods who watch over me, Sun, Moon, and Fire, would kill me in anger, wouldn't they?"

At that moment the Wind, who lives in every being, spoke from the sky, so that everyone could hear. "I can vouch for Damayanti's faithfulness. The moon, the sun, and I have protected the riches of her character continually for three years. Take her, O king. She loves you." At once flowers rained down, and the gods' drums rang out. A soft wind blew.

Everyone was amazed when the Wind announced himself and spoke of Damayanti's genuine feeling. Nala, now fully himself in his joy, thought of Karkotaka, who returned the piece of cloth. Nala put it on and regained his original form—broad-shouldered, brilliant as burnished gold, handsome as the god of love, or Indra, or the sun. When Damayanti saw him, she, too, regained her lustre, to everyone's delight. The dust of their bodies vanished with the pain of separation. The jewels they were wearing shone like the love they felt for each other. Bhima saw his daughter's happiness—it was as if fertile earth had at last received water—and he had the city decorated and special *pūjās* conducted in the temples.

Rtuparna noticed these celebrations and came to Nala. "You're a great man. When you were living in disguise, as Bahuka, with me, I employed you in various menial tasks. Please forgive me." Nala honoured him and gave him the Heart of Horses, and Rtuparna left for Ayodhya.

Nala stayed for a month in Vidarbha. Then, leaving Damayanti there, he borrowed from his father-in-law a single chariot, 16 elephants, 50 horses, and 600 foot soldiers, and went to Nisadha to find Puskara. He said to him: "I'll wager Damayanti if you feel like playing dice. You wager your kingdom. Let's play. Then again, the kingdom belongs to warriors. So let's mount our chariots and fight a furious battle. Whoever wins will take the whole kingdom, like a warrior should. Which of these two do you prefer?"

Puskara thought: "If I choose battle, I'll lose. But I beat him before at dice. This time I'll win Damayanti, too, and be even happier." So he said: "If I lose, all my kingdom is yours. If you lose, Damayanti is mine." He wagered, he played, he lost.

Thus Nala won back his kingdom from Puskara in the rematch, as everyone in the Rose-Apple Island knows. Nala said to him, "I was taken over by Kali when we played before, and my strength was ruined for a while; I was obsessed by the game of dice. Don't imagine it was your own power that defeated me. You are my cousin, and I don't want to kill you. Go." So he sent him away.

Damayanti returned to her husband, with her children, accompanied by the Goddess of Wealth. Together with his loving wife, Nala ruled over the whole earth, with all its riches, and performed hundreds of great rituals. Therefore, O Dharmaraja, don't be sad that you lost at dice. You, too, have that inner strength that comes to humans from gods. You will conquer your foes and regain your entire kingdom.' Brhadasva told his story thus, and taught Yudhisthira the Heart of the Dice.

This is the story of Nala. Whoever listens to it attentively, or reads it with devotion, will be absolved of all the flaws that come from Kali. They will enjoy the fruits of their good deeds. They will have children, grandchildren, long life, health, and riches. They will be far away from all poisonous beings and all evil influences. They will be just. Everyone knows this. Sing of Karkotaka, Damayanti, famous Nala, and Rtuparna, and you will be free from the fear of Kali.

Notes

1. *Nalopākhyāna* of Nannaya 3.2.2–230
2. The embodiment of the present degenerative age. Dvapara is the previous era.
3. *sabhā*
4. A vow of living like the low caste Sairandhri.
5. *Daśa*, "ten" in Sanskrit, is homonymous with the imperative *daśa*, "bite."
6. *Hṛdaya* can also mean "intention," as in *kavi-hṛdaya*—the poet's intended meaning.
7. Is there another (semi) *śleṣa*?—*sūta* ("charioteer")/*sūda* (="cook"; unattested in mss.)?

8. Jivala's speech is heavily Dravidian, perhaps a suggestion of low class dialect.
9. Here Nannaya clearly distances Nala from the Dull-Wit he is said to imitate. In the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, Nala seems to be speaking about himself, in the third person.
10. *asamarthuḍu*—literally, "incompetent." *Samartha* is used for a girl when she reaches puberty.
11. Note the sudden shift in title. Before learning the Heart of the Dice he is referred to as Bahuka.

An Indo-Persian Retelling of Nala and Damayanti

Muzaffar Alam • Sanjay Subrahmanyam

Introduction

We are aware from other essays and writings in this volume and elsewhere that the classical story of Nala and Damayanti had an amazing longevity in South Asia, and went through numerous reworking and retellings in Sanskrit and various regional and vernacular languages of the medieval and modern periods. But the story also enjoyed a further lease of life by passing from one of the great cosmopolitan and pan-regional tongues into another, namely from Sanskrit into Persian.[1] This essay seeks to analyse the story in an Indo-Persian reincarnation from the high Mughal period which tells the tale of "Nal and Daman." The version we examine was set down in Persian in the verse-narrative form known as the *masnavī* by the poet Abu'l Faiz ibn Mubarak (better-known by his pen-names of "Faizi" and "Fayyazi"), in the late sixteenth century. The poem artfully weaves together in a sophisticated synthesis motifs particular to *this* story, and motifs and elements common to other Indian and Persian tales with, importantly, Faizi's own reflections on politics, kingship and the transience of this world. Our analysis also concerns the later life of this text, which acquired great popularity among readers of Indian Persian, as we see from the numerous manuscripts that are available of it, in major collections both in South Asia and abroad.[2] In a subsequent phase, and especially in the course of the nineteenth century (as Persian began to give way increasingly to

Urdu), a number of authors also produced versions of the work in Urdu.[3] We will leave aside other Persian retellings such as that of Mohan Lal "Zirak" in the late seventeenth century, or early Hindavi retellings like that of Ahmad Sarawi in the early eighteenth century, but briefly focus on that of Munshi Bhagwant Rai "Rahat", *Nal-Daman Hindī*.[4] This was not mere translation, but represented a significant transformation of the text of Faizi, while still retaining a firm anchorage in the magnum opus of the Mughal poet and its central orientation.

The first question we must ask is how such a theme as the story of Nala and Damayanti, which we know both from the classical Indian tradition in Sanskrit, and from the flourishing vernacular traditions of medieval India, came to pass into Persian at the Mughal court.[5] What were the differences between the Sanskrit and vernacular versions and Faizi's, and what is their significance? In order to comprehend these questions, some broader historical trends need to be kept in mind.[6] First, it should be noted that even if Persian had entered India from an earlier period, that is the tenth-eleventh centuries, still its dominance was not assured by the end of the fifteenth century, during the period of so-called Afghan ascendancy over the politics in northern India. In Delhi as much as in the provinces, the main vernacular tongue of Hindavi had been given considerable encouragement by the Muslim Sultans of this period, and we know that it was a contender as a language both of administration and culture at the time of the reign of the Lodis and Surs. After the rise of the Mughals, Persian was once more brought to the fore in the second half of the sixteenth century as a language of culture and power. As a consequence, the efflorescence of Hindavi in northern India at least was somewhat stunted, and its development delayed or set back. Even the Hindu scriptures were translated into Persian in Akbar's time, and the relationship between Persian and Sanskrit was strengthened, bypassing the vernaculars to an extent. Stories that had been written in Hindavi and integrated into Indian Islam, such as the *Padmāvat* and *Madhumālati* were brought back into Persian under Mughal patronge, with a marked moment of advance during the epoch of Jahangir.[7] Clearly, a new form of Indo-

Persian literary synthesis was under way, with a point of inflection being through the Persian *masnavī* at the time of Akbar. Here it is important to bring out the significant role played by the Mughal poet-laureate Faizi in his attempt to bring a certain number of "secular" stories into Persian, of which the Nal-Daman narrative is a central example.

Faizi begins his text with a fairly elaborate if stylised *mise-en-scène*. He informs his readers that one night, sometime in the late sixteenth century, the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), summoned him to the court. The poet had been in his own quarters, in a meditative frame of mind; and when summoned he naturally rushed to the royal presence, thinking there might be some major crisis afoot. Instead, the emperor asked Faizi why, as the poet-magician of the court, the flute of his pen did not produce a poetic fire, and cast a new magic spell? In other words, why, instead of addressing the staple question of love in general, did the poet not turn to the specifics of "love as it happened in India" (*dar Hind za 'ishq sar guzashtī ast*) (Siddiqui 1987:130)? The words of instruction that are put in Akbar's mouth by the poet set out not only the general theme, but the very specific example of a story that already had wide currency at that time.

Nau sāz fasāna-i kuhan rā
'ishq-i Nal-o-khūbī-i Daman rā.

Tell that old tale anew,
Of the love of Nal and the beauty of Daman.
(...)

Sad naghma-i dard dar sukhan rīz
Dar saghar-i nau mai kuhan rīz.

Make a hundred songs of pain into poetry,
Fill the fresh goblet with an old wine. [p. 129, vv. 13, 16]

Moreover, Akbar suggested to the poet that he should place all his arts at the service of this enterprise, of bringing alive a story in which love had reduced the lovers themselves into a burnt offering at the temple:

Of the two lovers' coquetry and submission (*nāz-o-niyāz*),
carry lessons to the lovers' assembly.

See what love once was like in India (*dar Hind*),
the dagger-thrusts that drowned their hearts in blood.
How those who've played with love in this land,
passed on with their hearts and livers shattered.
How they burnt themselves in fire,
how they became ashes in love's temple. [p. 130, vv. 4–7]

Clearly, then, the issue to be dealt with was not one of love in general, but in its specific, Indian, manifestations. The underlying project could be seen as one where the larger Persian-speaking world was to be given access to one of those works that had a characteristically Indian flavor, a manifestation of the Hindustani "patriotism" that characterised the court of Akbar and Jahangir. Our contention, however, is that Faizi understood his task to be of greater significance than that, and thus took it upon himself to reinterpret, so to speak, the relationship between the poetic domain and the reading of the political sphere. The means available at his disposal from within the sphere of Indo-Persian poetics were clear enough. At the heart of the matter was the idea of "equivocation" or "deliberate ambiguity" (*īhām*), which though inherited from Iran, had been theorised afresh in a radical manner by the great poet Amir Khusrau of Delhi (d. 1325). The view espoused by Khusrau, according to which various possible meanings of a text were all equally legitimate, with none having true primacy, in fact came to gain very wide applicability, being utilised on the one hand by Sufis and on the other hand by writers of political treatises. This can be read equally from the *masnavīs* of Faizi, especially given the special relationship between the poet and his patron, Akbar. If, on the one hand, the Mughal poet reflects the prevailing mood of Akbar's period, it is equally clear that the poet (like his more celebrated brother Abu'l Fazl) had a part both in the making and the representation of political ideals.

Some Notes on Faizi

The poet Faizi was the son of Shaikh Mubarak Nagauri, an *'ālim*, a teacher-scholar, who had settled in the Mughal capital of Agra.[8] Among his father's twelve children (eight sons and four daughters),

from several marriages, three are best-known: Abu'l Faiz, Abu'l Fazl and Abu'l Khair. Known successively by the poetic names of Faizi and Faizi Fayyazi (the latter adopted in the closing years of his life), Abu'l Faiz was born in Agra on 5 Sha'ban 954 H. (24 September 1547) and was educated largely by his father. In 1566–67, Faizi and Mubarak gained admission to the court through the intercession of some influential persons, possibly Akbar's foster-brother Mirza 'Aziz Koka. Faizi was then successively given the post of tutor to the Mughal princes Salim, Murad and Daniyal, and soon became close to Akbar himself. In 1573–74, the second brother Abu'l Fazl was brought to the court on the recommendation of Faizi, and became a major influence as chronicler and ideologue during the second half of Akbar's reign. In 1581, Faizi was made *sadr* (head of the state ecclesiastical department) of Agra, Kalpi and Kalinjar, and three years later, he participated in the anti-Yusufza'i expedition to the north-west frontier of the Mughal domains. In 1588, Faizi was given the title of *malik-ush-shu'rā'* (or poet-laureate, the third poet to hold this title in the Mughal court), and in the same year, he accompanied Akbar to Kashmir, thereby cementing his close relationship with the ruler.[9] We possess quite extensive details on the poet's intellectual biography as well. Faizi certainly knew Arabic and Persian, but also Sanskrit. Among his teachers (besides his own father) was Khwaja Husain of Marw (d. 1571–72), from whom he is reported to have received instruction in poetry-writing. Not notably orthodox in his religious beliefs, Faizi was a particular devotee of the Chishti Sufi Khwaja Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakkar. Amongst his contemporaries, he also had good relations with another major religious figure, 'Abdul Haqq Muhaddis Dehlawi. By the close of his career, Faizi had attained the modest rank of 400 within the Mughal *mansabdārī* system, but would nevertheless seem to have been a man of some means, reputedly with a very large personal library of some 4,600 volumes.

Ranked first among the poets of his age by an admittedly prejudiced observer, his own brother, Shaikh Abu'l Fazl, Faizi was equally praised for his technical skills by Mulla 'Abdul Qadir Badayuni, who was otherwise not necessarily a great admirer of his.

Badayuni wrote: "In many separate branches of knowledge, such as poetry, the composition of enigmas, prosody, rhyme, history, philology, medicine and prose composition, Shaikh Faizi had no equal in his time" (Badayuni 1990:411–12). At the same time, Faizi's father, Shaikh Mubarak's past associations with the Mahdawis (during the reign of Islam Shah Sur), his supposed leanings towards Shi'ism, and his closeness to Akbar, these did not augur well for a relationship between him, his sons, and the more orthodox-minded savants at the court. Thus, we have the other side of Badayuni's judgement of Faizi: "All Jews, Christians, Hindus, and fire-worshippers, not to speak of Nizaris and Sabahis, held him in the very highest honor for his heresy, his enmity to the followers of Islam, his reviling of the very fundamental doctrines of our faith, his contemptuous abuse of the noble companions [of the Prophet] and those who came after them..." While this view must be treated with some skepticism, the text of the *masnavī* of *Nal-Daman* does confirm that Faizi was religiously flexible and tolerant, and particularly open to Chishti Sufi ideals and vocabulary.

Faizi Recounts his Tale

We can see that when Faizi was commissioned to present a Persian version of the Indian story of Nal and Daman, his resources were both ample, and yet somewhat restrictive. The poet conceived the story as one of a series of five *masnavīs* that he planned to write, but of which he completed only two before his premature death, namely the *Nal-Daman* text (completed in Safar 1003 H., a year before his death), and the *Markaz-i Adwār*, which he was finishing in his last weeks. The three other texts, namely *Sulaimān wa Bilqīs*, the *Haft Kishwar*, and the *Akbar Nāma*, were never completed, though the first had certainly been begun as early as 996 H (Desai 1963:25–27). The last project is a particularly intriguing one, for one may wonder how the poet would have adapted the *masnavī* form to the ends of writing an account of the reign of Akbar. In embarking on this vast programme, Faizi's ambition was quite clearly to make a statement that would extend beyond India to Iran, and to the

Persian-speaking world more generally, of which he saw himself as a part. It is surely no coincidence that the formal model for *Nal-Daman* comes from Nizami's *Layli-Majnūn*, in terms of the metrical scheme utilized as well as a number of other features; similarly, the *Markaz-i Adwār* was to correspond to Nizami's *Makhzan al-Asrār*. But Faizi also departed from the received models, whether in his choice of metaphors, in his capacity to draw on Indian cultural resources, or his own particular predilections which took him in directions that separate him both from his Indian and Persian forbears. It has often been assumed that this is the first "Indian" story that one finds in Persian *masnavī* tradition. This is not strictly true, with the misunderstanding perhaps arising from Badayuni's description of the *masnavī*. Amongst earlier texts, there is a short *masnavī* on an Indian theme by Hasan Sijzi Dehlawi, in the fourteenth century (cf. Siddiqi 1979); and to an extent even Amir Khusrau's *Dewāl Rāni Khizr Khānī* can be classified as a predecessor to Faizi's text. But an important difference is that Amir Khusrau was not drawing upon a major existing tradition; he was practically the first to write the Dewal Rani story, and thus had neither the same sorts of constraints nor the same range of options before him.

Existing scholarship has probably been less than just to Faizi's ambitious enterprise. Scholars dealing with Faizi as a poet have preferred to concentrate on his *dīvān* (Arshad 1967, reprint 1983), and have for the most part given relatively short shrift to the *masnavī* and its contents (Kirmani 1985:26–35)]. On those relatively rare occasions when the *masnavī* has attracted scholarly attention for its own sake, the main focus has been on Faizi's poetic quality as related to aesthetics and rhetorical traditions; besides, some attempts have also been made to judge the "Indian-ness" of the metaphors used in the text.[10] A notable exception is the series of essays by the textual scholar and epigraphist, the late Ziyauddin Desai.[11] Desai's main concern was to identify the sources used by Faizi, since his version seems to differ in some respects from the "original" story in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*; the conclusion after extensive comparisons (including with a seventeenth-century version from Gujarat) remain

somewhat ambivalent.[12] A particular consequence of Desai's comparative approach (followed by a certain number of later writers as well) is the near-inevitable conclusion that Faizi may be a good poet but that he is a poor story-teller: he is charged with having missed key elements, sacrificed character development for poetic effect, and introduced elements of incoherence into the story.

What are the so-called "defects" in Faizi according to these authors? First, that in his text the love between Nal and Daman begins without any proper explanation; no external reason is given for the fact that this love arises in their hearts. Second, on hearing of the beauty of Daman, the gods in the Ur-text start out to her *svayamvara* and they meet Nal on the way. In Faizi, the gods appear suddenly, without being introduced to the reader. Third, the reasons for Nal's decline and his misfortunes are linked in the Ur-text to Kali and Kali's influence (and to the rivalry between Kali and Nal), while this explanation is left out in Faizi. Faizi's text does not bring out the perseverance and bravery of Daman when she is abandoned, and thus she does not have the powerful character of the earlier version (possibly because Faizi sees her as the relatively passive beloved, *ma'shūq*, and not the more active lover, *'āshiq*).

The method by which a later version is constantly measured against an Ur-text is familiar to us from a number of contexts, and no doubt has its own usefulness. Our attempt here, however, will largely be to assess the text on Faizi's own terms, to see what he is trying to achieve by his telling. We will argue that Faizi, in fact, has quite another purpose in mind than earlier writers, namely to suggest that love (*'ishq*), and especially love in the milieu of kings, can be meaningful only when it is tempered. When love becomes excess, it can only lead to disaster, for this is the inevitable consequence of the neglect of the intellect (*'aql*) and of notions of equilibrium that are crucial both for kingship and social order. This can be seen as the development in an Indo-Persian context of the heritage of reflection from a far earlier Hellenic milieu concerning frenzy and *hubris*, which lead ineluctably to destruction; and we are aware that both Faizi and Abu'l Fazl drew often upon such Hellenic materials

for philosophical reflection. But it is also interesting to note that the schema in Faizi's case is not wholly deterministic; one can still pull back from the brink and return to a state of equilibrium.

Faizi naturally opens his work with the praise of God (*hamd*), followed by a very long two-part praise of the Prophet (*na'ṭ*), and then praise of the emperor Akbar. The story proper begins only after this very extensive set of prefatory remarks, and we enter into the *mise-en-scène* that we have already rehearsed at the outset. Indeed, when the emperor pronounced the words commissioning the text, Faizi reports that he found the task particularly challenging. His very hair stood on end: for how could he produce a poem that would both reduce its readers to tears, and bring fresh life to them, cause them to suffer by opening old wounds, while renewing them at the same time? How could he reduce pain itself to tears, making the ache in the heart itself ache? This was surely asking too much, the poet-laureate thought, and scarcely the sort of thing that one could simply pick up a pen and write. Yet, there was no option left to the poet, for how could he refuse the demands of an emperor whose orders (*farmān*) reached up to the very sky, and to whom the stars themselves submitted and bowed down? The poet hence agreed to take on the task. His model was clear from the start, namely the great Persian poet Nizami Ganjawi (ca. 1141–1209):

When the ebb and flow of this verse reach Layla,
she'll transform her clothes into chains.
When this magic is heard by Majnun,
he'll even forget Layla herself.
Let me arrange the fire-temple anew.
Let me tell of the love of idol and Brahmin (*but-o-barhaman*). [p. 131, vv. 18, 19; p. 132, v. 3]

This is a key set of terms that will recur time and again in the text, and which perhaps require some explanation. The role of the "idol" (*but*, deriving from Buddha, but also *sanam)*, is a complex one in the Persian poetry of the time. The lover is usually portrayed in terms of this metaphor as the worshipper of the idol, in a powerful device; an alternative mode is to present the beloved as *kāfir*, that is

as an infidel. Once the metaphor of the "idol" has been worked into the structure of a poem, a series of other possibilities open up, namely the references to the beloved's residence as a temple or idol-house, the reference to rivalry in terms of iconoclasm (the smashing of other idols etc). The intention is very clearly to turn on its head what is an eminently negative lexical item in an orthodox vocabulary, and the role of the poet is both to invert and to provoke. To be an "idol" in Persian poetry is thus no bad thing, whatever the use religious orthodoxy puts the same term to; but the consciousness that another (negative) use of the term exists is necessary to give the term its full piquancy. In his own use of metaphors impregnated with "Indian" local color, Faizi does not stop at *but* and *sanam*, but goes much further. The play between the Indian world of the Brahmin and his sacred thread (*zunnār*), and the classical Persian world of Layla and Majnun is thus clear from the start, as indeed is the relationship between the linguistic worlds and registers that are to be played with.

Let me combine the melody (*āhang*) of the Indian voice,
with the sound of instruments from Pahlawi and Dari.
Let me take my suffering's candle
and ignite it at the fire-temples of Fars.
We shall take our thoughts to the Iranians,
and offer this fire to them in gift. [p. 132, vv. 7–9]

This is an integral part of Faizi's conception of matters, for his audience is not only within India but embraces the larger Persian-speaking world, including Safavid Iran. At the very end of the poem he returns to this theme, speaking of how he has brought together the patterns of Ganja (native place of Nizami) with the ideas of Delhi, and erected an idol-house which is still accessible to the intelligent reader who is not immersed in matters Indian. This is his idea then of a new style, where the best of India and Iran may be combined to fresh effect. We shall have occasion to return to these themes in later sections of the essay.

So far as Faizi is concerned then, the central theme to be dealt with is love (*'ishq*), and some ten pages are devoted to it, once the

introduction has been completed and before we enter into the narrative proper (Siddiqui 1987:143–54). A series of clever oppositions is introduced, including a particularly crucial initial one between love (*'ishq*) and intellect (*'aql*). Though Faizi is an avowed partisan of the intellect, he notes that at least initially he will suppress his own inclinations, and use the pulpit of intellect in order to declaim a sermon in praise of love.

Love shimmers like a thousand flames,
while intellect is like a thousand damp cotton-pieces,
O intellect! You may have a thousand lives,
but for now, remain silent.
In love's presence, stand up and pay respect.
Love is an emperor without weapons.
Love is a king even in the midst of ruins.
Its buried treasures may be found deep in the desert.
Its wealth may be found even in an empty hand.
Passion is its fighting-force,
tears are the guardians of its court. [p. 144, vv. 9–13]

And so the poet concludes, pressing the paradox to its logical end:

A hundred seditions may arise while you're seated,
a hundred victories concealed in defeat here.
...
On the soil of destruction stands its throne,
The dark of night is its lamp of fortune.
...
Thriving here is the same as ruination,
While failure here is success itself. [p. 144, vv. 15, 17, 19]

Having set out his first contrast between *'ishq* and *'aql*, Faizi now moves to a new opposition, that between *'ishq* and *husn* (beauty). Love is vulnerable, and ever-seeking, whereas beauty is distant, refuses to engage, and is altogether remarkable for its indifference. Beauty fires arrows, and love is wounded; beauty is the flame, and love the moth. Yet when *'ishq* attains its height, it is no mean force either; it can melt iron, and even beauty becomes prepared, however reluctantly, to praise it. At this moment, love and beauty can be

one. Eventually, the roles of captor and captive are reversed; Beauty comes to be captured by Love, and the two come together like wine in a glass or melody on the string. Not only this: the place of *'ishq*, writes Faizi, is all the more marked in India, a land that seems to have a particular gift or aptitude, in his view, for love.

This fire is aflame in Hind,
For it's here that the sun really blazes.
I've just heard of love in 'Arab and 'Ajam
But in Hind I'll tell of what I've seen.
I'll draw you such a picture in this book
that you'll feel you've seen what you hear. [p. 147, vv. 9–11]

In Hind, writes Faizi, insisting once more on his point, both moth and flame are burnt, and it is not as if one is burnt in the other as is so often the case elsewhere. The old distinction between *ma'shūq* and *'āshiq*, beloved and lover, partly dissolves in this context. The comparison with other places in the world such as the Arab lands, Iran and even Armenia, can only be unfavorable to them, as Hind alone is the place where Faizi finds all virtues relating to the real meaning and content of love. This is applicable not only to love in the abstract, but to certain rather concrete elements within the play of love; for the Indian Beloved (idols, *sanamān*) too has some very special qualities.

Their bloodshot eyes, both daggers and salt-merchants,
How can the intellect dare face up to them? [p. 150, vv. 11–12]

This takes us to the third of the contrasts which Faizi employs to build up his second level of frames, and which appear to us to be the keys to construction of the text as a whole. This is the oppositional relationship and tension between *'ishq* and *junūn* (or frenzy), that excessive state to which love can lead. For if love is a tree, frenzy represents the flowers and fruit that grow on it. Now, in the normal state of things, writes Faizi, only the intellect can control love. But when love bares itself, and stretches out its arms, such is its power that the intellect falls tumbling into its grave. Love then runs completely out of control, recognising neither the emperor nor the

dervish. Yet, even so all hope is not lost. When one moves from human love (*'ishq-i majāzī*) to divine love (*'ishq-i haqīqī*), one can still try and carry the river of love to its true destination, namely the Sea of Divine Love. This temporal love is then like a sort of interim step, a purgatory before entering into reality. Here, Faizi moves effortlessly into a Sufi vocabulary, exhorting his reader to search for true beauty, that which is beyond and which is eternal, rather than that which one finds on this earth. He states that he too is a lover (*'āshiq*), but only in that other sense, namely as a Sufi who is searching for the other Reality. We may hence be left with an ambiguous feeling. Is Faizi in favor of *'ishq*, as one might think from a first reading, or actually reticent about it? Is his praising of love just a deft tactic, only to reinstate the place of the intellect? These issues emerge more clearly in the narrative itself.

The Beginnings of Love

Love sets upon the hero, king Nal, like a malady, and the first section of the narrative develops the theme of lovesickness, physicians and cure both at the level of the plot and at the level of an etiology of love. That the events take place not in the heartland of Hindustan but farther to the south is appropriate, since Faizi, like his brother Abu'l Fazl, was something of a traveller, though neither actually set foot outside India so far as we know. The most famous of Faizi's travels was in the capacity of Mughal ambassador to the Deccan, where his task was to browbeat a variety of subordinate or inferior rulers into accepting their "proper" place in the Mughal-centered world. Some geographical detail allow the reader to situate and contextualise the tale:

That in a country of Hind was a king,
A handsome black-eyed man,
A ruler with a huge army,
the land of Ujjain was his capital.
He was known as Nal, and amongst kings,
he held sway like the pupil in the eye.
A wise king, and awe-inspiring,
sage and brimful with reason. [p. 154, vv. 15–16; p. 155, vv. 1–2]

Nal's qualities are now listed out: he is brave, generous, lion-like in battle, but also an incomparable host in wine-filled evenings. The world at large benefited from his justice (*'adl*), while at the same time his intellect (*'aql*) had resolved a large number of problems. In sum, the image of Nal that we have from Faizi is not altogether dissimilar from the manner in which he might present his own patron, Akbar, in other contexts. The resemblance does not stop there. Just as Akbar was celebrated for his fondness for the elephants in his stable, which he reputedly knew individually by name and appearance, Nal here (as in the *Mahābhārata*) is noted for his fondness for and expert knowledge of horses.

Nal is famed besides for his boundless wealth, and his court too is full of wise courtiers and advisers. It was their habit to tell him stories as part of the daily court-routine, in which two of the major themes treated were, inevitably, love and beauty. Everything so far is perfectly normal, as it might be in the Mughal court; the minor detail that the king prefers not to read but rather to have things read out to him, confirms his resemblance to the poet's "illiterate" model, namely Akbar. Faizi suggests that Nal had heard so many stories of love over the years that he was somewhat fearful of falling prey to the malady. Yet, when the time came, he could not prevent it. One day, all of a sudden, Nal is possessed by love. His sentiments are confused and inexplicable. He wonders what ails him as he is at first unable to diagnose his own problem, the symptoms of which are anxiety and a sense of helplessness. Something seems to have happened to him in his sleep. Yet, how could this have transpired? How could bandits have stolen into his treasure in spite of all the guards (in the form of the intellect) that have been patrolling all around? Nal senses that some sentiment of commotion (*fitna*) has been introduced into his blood, as if his house has been set on fire, as if he has been stabbed by a dagger, or as if he has been given a debilitating drug of some sort. After reflecting a while, he asks himself: "Can this be an attack of *'ishq* after all?" (Siddiqui 1987:163). The king addresses his courtiers, urging them to exercise their wisdom to discover a remedy for the state in which he finds himself. We note that Daman has not yet appeared in the story, nor is there

the least mention of her. Simply, spontaneously, *'ishq* has appeared in the ruler's heart. Here, then, is a specific characteristic of the story as Faizi tells it. No images, words or external stimuli are needed. The potential for *'ishq* lies full-blown, as it were, in everyone; it is only a question of when it will make itself known. An eminent physician is called in to diagnose the malady. He checks Nal's pulse and calls for some of the usual pathological samples that were employed in the *yunānī* medicine of Faizi's time. But Nal himself has little doubt:

Nal said: 'O foolish doctor!
Don't diagnose my illness like this.
Haven't you heard of the heart's fevers,
when the vein of frenzy is sliced open?
Look to my turbulent heart,
and throw that urine-sample in the fire.
My heart's phial is filled with blood,
Inspect it and ask why it is so.' [p. 165, vv. 8–11]

The doctor is nonplussed and reports his own discomfiture. The king whose intellect had reached the very sky, the doctor declares, is now a victim of the fire of youth. It is clear that *'ishq* is at work, and this has now gone beyond the normal course of love to attain the turbulence of frenzy (*junūn*). The only remedy is to find a beautiful young woman. Approached by the minister to confirm the diagnosis, Nal is still lucid enough to offer him advice. Though a great hunter, he states, he has himself somehow been entrapped and wounded. The first remedy, or rather an interim solution, is, typically, for the courtiers to gather and recount various love stories to him, in the hope that this discursive engagement will distract and cure the king. After each courtier has offered him a tale from a different place, with no visible effect on Nal however, finally one courtier gets up and states that rather than recount a story from the past, he will instead offer something from the present. If a solution is to be found, it cannot be in the old, but in contemporary events. His tale concerns the land of the Deccan, a notable source of commotion (*fitnakhīz*), where a great turbulence has arisen in recent times. Who or what is this?

A magical idol, an illusory idol,
has destroyed patience the world over.
A flower-like face, lovely, Daman by name,
her tresses have cast a net on the garden.
Her intoxicated eyes like an Indian idol's temple,
the very idols of Hind worship her.
Hundreds of Brahmins are bathed in their blood,
when she visits the temple, idols shatter.
Her palace has set Somnath aflame,
Each idol has rent its sacred thread. [p. 169, vv. 8–12]

The praise continues verse after verse, with the same bitter-sweet vocabulary where the iconoclasm of the past (Mahmud of Ghazna's raids on Somnath have clearly not been forgotten in the Mughal court) is brilliantly redeployed to a quite different end. When this Deccani princess speaks, it is at once sweet and salty, and her mouth is compared by the speaker/poet to a pistachio-nut filled with almonds. The contrast with the normal beauty of the Iranian *masnavī*'s heroine is clear, for the Indian princess is both dark and beautiful, and thus both salty and sweet "as if in sugar-candy one had thrown in some brackish salt." This beauty has so far been protected from the public gaze, and only her mirror knows her image well. Yet, rumors of Daman's beauty have spread far and wide, and she is known now through the seven climes, and all kings are eager to marry her. Nal listens to this elaborate description with rapt attention. At length he lets out a heartfelt sigh, as if he now understands the real reason for his sickness. This princess must be the reason for his state, it is her tresses that have troubled him, her arrow of love that has entered his heart, though he in fact has had no contact with Daman. Yet the knowledge that his love is a tangible object with a geographical location provides no remedy to the malady. Rather, the knowledge acts like the proverbial oil on fire, making it burn all the more fiercely. Nal reproaches the storyteller for making his wound deeper. And yet he wants to know more, to worsen his own situation even further, for such is the illness of love.

The circumstances attending Daman's birth introduces a new narrative and provides the opportunity for much advice (*nasīhat*)

on kingship and the qualities of a good ruler. There was a king of a place called Bidar in the Deccan, further south from Ujjain, whose wife was barren. The king was desolate but he could not marry again, for he did not dare to share his marital bed with two women. After trying various remedies, he was told that another king dwelt in his lands, one who had become a *faqīr* and renounced the world. Though bereft of all worldly possessions, he still had the mighty power of asceticism. Hence the king went barefoot to see this ascetic monarch who was living in a desert, to seek his advice, perhaps ask for a boon.[13]

The dervish began the interview by giving the king some general advice on the nature of power and its place in the world, as well as the dependence of kings on saints and ascetics (Siddiqui 1987:178).[14] He stressed the need for humility and for generosity: the metaphor used is of the king as a sort of innkeeper, ministering to the people (*khalq*). Framed within the text, and placed in the mouth of this royal sage is, then, a condensed version of Faizi's views of kingship, in which the king must give even more than what God has given him. For, unless the king is generous, the shower of wealth from above will not favor him either. The attributes of a king must extend beyond material giving, however, to a real empathy with his subjects ("Keep your hands ever open, and also your heart, and thus open the seals of both treasures"). Crucially, in the midst of this generosity and this seeming hedonism, all this feasting, the king should never lose his equilibrium. Thus, while being intoxicated (*mast*), and dancing on the roof, the ruler should make sure that his foot does not slip and bring him tumbling down:

When you're blowing the trumpet from the rooftops,
remember dawn brings remorseful prayers.
Sing in such harmony with others,
that your song brings them no grief. [p. 179, vv. 6–7]

This crucial point seems likely to be a reflection of the characteristic Akbari motif of *sulh-i kull*, universal peace, a recipe for a sort of social harmony mediated by royal power, of which we also find powerful reflections in the writings of others in Akbar's court, notably Faizi's brother, Shaikh Abu'l Fazl. These passages can be linked to

others regarding the idea of balance and harmony (the key terms being *tawazun* and *i'tidāl*), often contrasted in the literature on statecraft (*akhlāq*) to other notions such as *ifrat* (excess) and *tafrīt* (shortfall).[15] The ideal ruler must understand that to have power is a reflection of his own good fortune, and hence make it his duty to be governed constantly by his intellect (*khirad*, a notion very close to that we have already encountered of *'aql*). Finally, rather than depending on a small coterie of advisers, the king must have a broader awareness of his public image. For isolation is the bane of kings, and even of courtiers. The irony that this message, doubly framed as the advice given by the royal sage to the king and by a courtier to the sick Nal, will be disregarded in the future by Nal is one that should not be lost on the reader. The dervish's final advice concerns the real end of kingship, which is to be remembered in favorable terms by the subjects over whom one has ruled ("May your acts be such that when you've departed, the world sounds the bugle of mourning").

After giving this advice, the royal sage, who had by now understood the real reason for the other king's presence, gave him two oranges and an apple, hinting that these fruits would yield the king two sons and a daughter. True to the promise, in the following years a son was born to the queen, then another, and finally a daughter. As this daughter was incredibly beautiful, the king took her to seek the dervish's blessings. The royal sage was pleased with her, spoke some words about her future, read her horoscope (*fāl*), and gave her the name of Daman (Siddiqui 1987:183). This, explained the courtier to Nal, was the same girl whose fame had spread far and wide, causing commotion the world over. His advice to Nal was that he should attempt to win her hand, even though a vast number of competitors and rival royal suitors stood in his way.

The course of love

The next section of the poem is devoted to the condition of Nal once his lovesickness has been thoroughly diagnosed. The typical motif of the lover's complaint at the beloved's indifference, pointing

to the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between them, is somewhat modified here to suggest that the pain may be felt by both. A succession of familiar motifs—the portrait, the bird as messenger, and the letters—then carries the narrative forward.

To begin with, then, Nal blames Love (*'ishq*) itself, and berates it for having made him its victim. Why can't he be left alone instead of being besieged in his own house? In the second phase, the tone changes. He realises that Love is not such an unmitigated evil after all. In a part-ironic but part-sincere fashion, Nal congratulates Love for having taken over his life, and having brought spring to his garden. Then, in a third phase, Nal addresses an imaginary Daman, whom he has of course not yet seen and only heard of. These verses take the familiar position of blaming the beloved, who is of course inevitably seen as heartless, but who must nevertheless be asked for mercy:

O candle of mine, where are you?
O destroyer of my house, where are you?
Sight unseen, you plunged a sword in my breast,
O heartless one! You didn't even regret it.
A sword has been aimed at me, the king.
An arrow has been fired at me, the moon.
Your wound in my heart has rendered me ill,
from the very first day, the blood keeps flowing. [p. 187, vv. 18–19; p. 188, vv. 1–2]

This suffering is however not to be in vain, for Nal is convinced that his destiny is now forever intertwined with that of Daman.

These are not just boasts from my tongue,
for I'm a Veda-reciting Brahmin,
So far, I've depended on my idols,
but now I worship you, not them. [p. 188, v. 20; p. 189, v. 1]

Faizi's technical mastery is evident here, in his capacity to move from the register of advice and abstract political reflection to virtuoso love-poetry:

Without you, I weep tears of blood,
and what do you respond?

Without you, my eyelashes are in the dust,
while you sleep on a coquette's bed.
Without you, my eyes drip blood,
while you smile in the flower-garden. [p. 189, vv. 6–7, 9]

And, though, thus far the asymmetric nature of the relationship between the Beloved (*ma'shuq*) and Lover (*'āshiq*) is stressed, there are now clear hints that the pain is felt equally by both. Toward the end of the section Nal says:

Those who speak of love,
say turmoil rages on both sides. [p. 190, v. 9]

This is of course perfectly prescient, for Faizi informs us soon enough that meanwhile in the Deccan, Daman is undergoing the same pangs and torments. On the very night that Love entered Nal's heart, Daman too became restless while lying on her bed. It turns out that the Beloved and the Lover are in fact sharing a more or less symmetric moment.

The burning of desire and heartache,
was like wine poured at once in two glasses.
Like the same note sounded from two different keys,
the same intoxication in two different spots.
The suffering that love induced in the Lover,
the Beloved welcomed as her guest.
The bell the Lover tolled in grief,
echoed in the Beloved's heart. [p. 191, vv. 12–15]

Yet, though their suffering is symmetric (or at least more so than we might have suspected), still it is clear that in this section the woman's love is, to an extent, derivative. This is in contrast to other versions, and reflects Faizi's preference for a story in which the male character dominates. Daman has been seized, as it were, by Nal's love, as we see in Daman's own reflection:

Whose love now walks with me?
In whose grasp has my wrist fallen? [p. 193, v. 7]

Daman, no less than Nal, is able soon enough to find out who is responsible for her state, playing on the strings of her heart. Having

discovered his identity, she then makes an imaginary portrait (*naqsh*) of her lover, by way of consolation, though she explains it to her slaves and companions as an idol which she worships. The motif of lovesickness re-enters here. The whole palace has become alarmed, and her illness and her obsession with the portrait come to the attention of her parents. In her case, the fear is of a potential scandal. The royal family (*dūdmān-i shāhī*) is particularly vulnerable to rumors that might spread. On the other hand, the king reflects, if he were to brutally suppress his daughter's love he would be criticised by his people as well. Daman, on her part, protests that it is not her fault; it is Nal who is the cause of all her problems.

A bird, captured in Nal's garden, is instrumental in bringing the lovers together. The trapped bird, who comes from Sri Lanka, is presented to Nal and pleads to him with the voice of a small child:

"O broken-hearted and dejected one,
your own bird is caught in a lovely net.
My wings are already like a cage,
so open the doors of this other prison.
Here I cry in one cage,
and over it you've placed yet another.
I too have an idol, my very life's breath;
I've been left here, and she's flown away.
I'm burning in fire from separation,
the freedom of one is the cage of the other." [p. 204, vv. 2–3, 5–7]

These pathetic lines draw parallels between the bird's own fate and that of Nal. The bird declares that if he is released he will surely serve Nal in some way, for he is no ordinary creature. He knows a thousand stories, and has seen myriad things. Neither love (*'ishq*) nor frenzy (*junūn*) is unknown to him, and he is well acquainted with the tricks employed by the Beloved as well.

The bird is an accomplished conversationalist and poet, highly literate and able to read the words of both humans and gods. He offers to intercede with Daman. All Nal needs to do is to put down his thoughts in a secret letter, accompanied by an oral message (*paighām*) that the bird would carry to Daman. Nal now takes the

bird to the bank of a nearby stream, takes out a pen and writes a "letter of separation" *(firāq-nāma)*, a mix of direct praise and praise-through-blame, in which each word drips with pain. After a score of verses extolling Daman's beauty, the letter goes on to declare Nal's love for her, a love that has him lying drunk from her liquor, weak to the point of being reduced to the thinness of a strand of hair. These elaborate verses are once more a sort of virtuoso performance on Faizi's part, as he develops a theme by repeatedly using the same alliterative structures. Beyond the despair and the lamentation, there eventually emerges a concrete proposition. Nal tells Daman that he is no ordinary man and that he desires a union with her. The letter closes as follows:

"This letter that tells the tale of love's sorrow
is also a bouquet of the spring of love.
This letter which carries the secret of my heart
is Nal's supplication to Daman.
The song wet with tears that travels here,
carries a hundred heartaches in each cry.
Those who can grasp the point of words
can make a book from each letter.
Hark to the sound of this bell,
and my excuses for this long-windedness." [p. 210, vv. 11–15]

Ending the letter on this rather prosaic note, Nal sprinkles some amber on it by way of perfume. He then gives additional oral instructions to the bird, on how he is to salute Daman, and what precisely he is to say to her. There is no real need to reply to the letter, he adds, for a meeting alone would suffice. Nal then dries the ink with his heavy sighs, ties the letter up with strings and knots that parallel his accumulated travails, and places it under the bird's wing.[16]

The bird now sets out with this secret letter (*nāma-i rāz*), which is equally a love-letter (*nāma-i 'ishq*). Flying over mountains and deserts, he reaches Daman's palace, and after catching her attention he cleverly retreats until he reaches a corner of the garden, far from Daman's companions. The bird then begins to speak, using those poetic words of which he is a master, and reveals that he is no

ordinary bird but Love itself, as well as a messenger of love. This secret is tied under his wing. Having delivered this first morsel, he hops up onto Daman's hand. His seductive talk now continues, and he also makes it clear that the letter comes from none other than Nal, "the cypress-tree of the spring of youth."

Daman swoons, intoxicated by these words. When she recovers, she signals to her companions to move away, so that she can speak to the bird alone. Presently, she opens the letter and begins to read it. Each word in it strikes her as fiery, and capable of melting the intellect. Still, she reads it from beginning to end, enchanted by both the words and the verses it contains. Daman at once begins to compose a letter in response, rather more purposeful than Nal's, as the first lines show:

"I begin my letter in the name of God,
the one who has lit the lamp of purpose," [p. 215, v. 2]

After several lines in praise of the Almighty, the letter addresses Nal directly, as the "emperor of the age" (*shāhinshāh-i zamāna*):

"Salutations to Nal from Daman,
from my eyes a message to your heart." [p. 215, v. 10]

The letter she has received, Daman writes, is full of frenzied passion (*junūn*) and has also called up the same passion in her, to the point that her state is no better than his. Daman points to her wretched condition in the palace, reviled by all those around her and a cause of distress to her father and mother. She would gladly fly and join him but she is secluded within the four walls of the palace (*pardā-nashīn*). He must take the initiative as he is free. The letter alternates between moments of despair and others of hope and exhilaration. Daman notes, for example, that her horoscope is a fine one, and so things can only turn out well and she is most eager to meet him. All in all, this letter is rather less elaborate than that sent by Nal, perhaps something less of a poetic *tour de force*. Once it has been completed, Daman seals it with her eyelashes, perfumes it with her tresses, ties it with a piece of her headcloth and gives it back to the bird, who carries it to Nal.

This exchange of letters can hardly be kept a secret for long. Daman's father comes to hear of it soon enough, for neither the smell of wine nor that of love can be concealed, writes Faizi. He calls in the astrologers and asks for their advice. Brahmins are sent out to spread the good news that Daman's marriage is to be fixed. Only royal suitors, of good family and character, need apply. The time and date are stated when these suitors are to present themselves. When this news spreads, all the rulers of the world decide to try their luck; even some of the pagan gods (*parīzhād*) think they should try for Daman's hand, who will place a flower-garland around the neck of her preferred suitor amongst those assembled. This type of gathering, Faizi notes, is common enough in India, and goes by the name of *saimbar* (that is, *syavamvara*). All the preparations are thus made, and Nal too decides to make his way there.

Nal's march towards Bidar, the place where the wedding is to be held, is described in majestic verses, as if the poet were describing the advance of the victorious Mughal armies from one place to another:

Hundreds of way-stations were gilded with carpets,
hundreds of caravans were laden with Chinese silks,
With wine and savories in sack after sack,
and perfumes from China and Tartary. [p. 223, vv. 18–19]

Meanwhile, Daman is impatient to catch a glimpse of Nal amongst her many suitors. In spite of the imaginary portrait she has made, she still trembles with fear lest she might make a mistake while choosing her bridgegroom. The tension mounts. When Daman eventually appears at the assembly of princes, Nal is present there but the pagan gods who have shown up adopt a ploy in order to trick Daman:

Nal stood there intoxicated,
like fermenting wine, under a rose-tree's shadow.
She came and looked at both sides of the throng,
where it seemed the moon and stars had come out.
In great desire, she glanced at Nal,
handsome and graceful beyond compare.

At that spot were two or three gods,
tricksters and sons of devils,
who, hearing of Daman's beauty,
had their own eyes on her.
A beauty that had drawn the gods,
and cast a spell on magicians. [p. 227, vv. 1–6]

These pagan gods (*parī-nazhādān*) have transformed themselves so that each of them looks identical to Nal. How is Daman to recognize the real Nal? She prays to the real God (as distinct from these false ones): "O God (*Yā rabb*), reveal the secret of this riddle to me, and show me what is real." Her wish is granted, for a divine beam of light appears, accompanied by a voice which says: "Know that there are three signs of the gods (*parī*). Their eyebrows do not meet, their feet do not touch the ground, and their bodies cast no shadow." Armed with this knowledge, Daman is now easily able to recognise the real Nal. Smiling, she approaches and garlands him, while the others lose hope. The two are thus united, and Faizi devotes several dozen verses to this happy outcome, using a series of metaphors gathered largely from nature, but still remarkable for their unusually direct eroticism within the context of contemporary Persian poetry:

Venus was seated on the moon's lap,
a bouquet of a hundred stars on her shoulder.
For a moment, exchanging glances,
two flower-buds kissed.
For a moment, raising their glances,
they cast off the rose-leaves they wore,
showing their beauty, unabashed,
entwined like two trees, branch to branch.
When the treasure was on the palm,
the key entered the pearl's lock;
the pond's purity was discovered
and the fountain within began to gush.
As if spring had caught fire,
and raindrops had begun to fall.
...

Pearl-seeds borne by raindrops,
came down and filled the oyster. [p. 229, vv. 13–19; p. 230, v. 4]

These are metaphors that we shall have occasion to encounter again, albeit somewhat transformed, in the hands of a nineteenth-century Urdu poet. Here Faizi has deftly used the pagan gods without deviating from the monotheism that his audience expects from him. Like his near contemporary, the Portuguese poet Luís Vaz de Camões, whose *Lusíadas* also contains a large dose of pagan gods as a conceit within an essentially Christian framework, Faizi allows the *parī-nazhād* a place, but keeps them in check rather than allowing them full play (Raman 2002:29–88).

Exile and return

After the marriage is celebrated the bride and groom return to the city of Ujjain, the capital-city of Nal's kingdom. But Nal's problems are far from over; in fact, they have just begun. The main reason for this, in Faizi's view, stems from his being a victim of the frenzy of passion (*shorish-i junūn*), that excess which means that he cannot find the right balance between love and the exercise of reason. Indeed, the poet tells us, one can never count on the vagaries of Fortune and the Age, which vary all the time; their wine changes color constantly, and life itself is no more than a gambling-house (*qimār-khāna*). If at times, you are riding high, at other moments you may fall into the depths. The part of the story that follows exemplifies this truth.

Nal, who until now has been counted amongst the great rulers of his time, becomes completely lost to pleasure (*nishat*). It is as if his good fortune has been exhausted in his earlier enterprise of finding Daman. He comes now to be possessed by the frenzy of passion (*sauda-i junūn*). In his life, love (*'ishq*) and frenzy (*junūn*) thus come to form an alliance against the intellect (*'aql*). The result of this is that he loses all sense of equilibrium and balance (*i'tidāl*), which is the essential quality of the good ruler according to Faizi's understanding.

This is the moment when Nal's sinister younger brother decides to take advantage of him. He proposes a game of chess to Nal as a diversion, but his real intention is far more dubious. Nal, who is already a prisoner of *junūn,* falls into this whirlpool as its unsuspecting victim. But, to a great extent, he is responsible for the misfortune that befalls him. In the game Nal wins at first and grows overconfident. Losses now follow, one after the other. His courtiers advise him not to continue playing, but their intellect (*khirad*) is in vain. Having lost all his goods and his treasure, Nal is presently left with only his kingdom, and soon that too is gone. Moreover, he is completely oblivious to the criticism of the people (*khalq*) at his comportment, which is not only self-destructive but also detrimental to their welfare. Faizi concludes:

When *'ishq* and *junūn* join together,
Sorrow becomes a storm of misfortunes. [p. 235, v. 18]

Nal is obliged, like the Pandavas in their time, to abandon his kingdom and his capital. All of a sudden, his world has turned upside down. None of his erstwhile courtiers and friends come forward to support him, disgusted perhaps at his disregard for their advice. Only Daman is left by his side in this moment of immense difficulty. Nal and Daman are compelled to make their way on foot to the wilderness. Their delicate feet are soon blistered and bruised; the royal couple, who were used to walking in gardens, are now obliged to tramp the jungles of the region, as the Age itself has turned against the king. The transformation from palace to wilderness occurs with astonishing rapidity, in the course of a few dozen verses (Siddiqui 1987:237). After some days of hunger and bewilderment, Nal suffers further abasement when the bird he is trying to catch with his remaining garment flies away with it, leaving him completely naked, and reproaches him in the bargain. Nal grumbles and laments, comparing the difference between his earlier state and the one in which he finds himself. This is the Springtime of his Love (*bahār-i 'ishq*), he declares with bitter irony, but also showing a certain lucidity in relation to his condition. The poet now presents Nal with all his flaws, which adversity brings out ever more strongly. Not only is he

an incompetent hunter, he is an inveterate grumbler, and it turns out that he is suspicious too. Faizi reflects here briefly on where love can lead.

When love crosses the bound into intoxication,
it begins to tyrannise everyone.
Love becomes a tyrant Sultan
who thinks justice comes from destroying good. [p. 244, vv. 1–2]

This leads to a turning point in the story, for Nal has begun to think of leaving Daman as he cannot bear to live with her in such conditions. He suggests that she should return to her parents' house, and if ever his fortune changes for the better, they may be reunited one day. Daman resists this proposal, and eventually insists on the need for faith (*wafa'*) between lovers under all possible circumstances. Even if '*ishq* and *junūn* have come to be mixed up in him, she remarks, Nal should still resist going to such extents and even now try to exercise some degree of self-control. Even the frenzy of passion cannot excuse one from saying that one's lover should leave. After all, they are lovers not enemies.

But even if Nal accepts her argument for a time, his inner turmoil does not allow him to rest. So, one night while Daman is sleeping, he cuts off half the cloth that serves as her garment, wraps himself in it and leaves silently. When she awakes, Daman is naturally in great distress as Nal is not to be found anywhere. Daman addresses bitter reproaches to him, ostensibly directed at *her* heart, which had taken residence in his (Siddiqui 1987:247).

O my heart! What has happened?
Why have you fought with me?
You've gone without a word,
thinking nothing of my sad state.
You've left me on the bed to die,
abandoned me sleeping in the dust,
I've become sorrow and grief itself,
blood flows from my eyes and heart.
What wise men have said is true:
There is a method in madness.

You've abandoned the path of faith,
and invented a new form of love.
You've broken love's magic spell,
and robbed love's passion of its dignity.
Love and passion existed before you,
but you've transformed the face of love. [p. 247, vv. 3–10]

Daman has to face the dangers of the jungle alone. She is barely saved from a huge snake, which attempts to kill and eat her, by a passing traveller though she wishes to die and has been looking for a wolf or a lion to eat her up. Presently, she reaches the edge of a river and meditates on her bad fortune. She feels that it would have been far better if the dervish had not granted her father a boon and that she had not been born. But then some benevolent spirits, dressed in white (*safid poshān*), offer her good advice and urge her not to despair. Further along she encounters an army, whose general asks her to accompany them to his capital city. But the army is attacked by wild elephants and destroyed, and only a few Brahmins and Daman escape. They take care of her, and she eventually reaches the kingdom to which the army belonged. Here, Daman is well-received by the king and queen, and appointed as boon companion to their daughter.

Nal, meanwhile, has begun to feel guilty almost immediately after abandoning Daman. He decides that one day he will make it all up to her and admit his faults. But a series of puzzling encounters and tests awaits him first. While still wandering in the jungle, he comes across a huge snake burning in a forest fire. The snake had been cursed by a Brahmin he had bitten the previous day and is paying the karmic price for it. He pleads to Nal for help. After some hesitation, Nal rescues him from the fire. The snake then asks Nal to count to ten; and on the count of ten, bites Nal, which turns his body black. Nal protests at this injustice. The snake reassures him and tells him that his changed appearance will serve him as a good disguise. And that Nal would revert to his original looks by burning half the skin the snake had just shed. The snake also advises Nal to go to the city ruled by king Rutbarn and seek employment there under the name of Bahuk Darvesh. Nal could serve the king in his stables, and the king, who is

expert at dice-playing, could help Nal improve his skills in gambling. Nal takes the snake's advice, and king Rutbarn is pleased to acquire a servant who can not only look after horses, but is also a splendid cook. So, during the day, Nal works for the king. But at night, he mourns for Daman who he believes is lost in the forest.

Meanwhile, Daman's parents are seeking her, having learned that she and Nal have been exiled from Ujjain. Her father sends out his Brahmin-agents to enquire from all the passing caravans for information. One of these Brahmins, a certain Sadev, eventually arrives in the town where Daman now resides. He spots her at a Vedic recital in a temple. The two meet, and Daman enquires anxiously after her parents. Word of this encounter reaches the queen of the city, who asks Daman for her true identity, supplementing this with information from Sadev. A convenient coincidence now emerges. It turns out that the queen is Daman's maternal aunt, and so she is naturally overjoyed to discover her niece's identity. Daman is sent back to Bidar, her native place. But she is still disconsolate and enlists her wet-nurse (*daya*) in the task of finding Nal. The king and queen are informed, and they decide to send out their trusty Brahmin-agents once more on spying missions, to look out for the most miserable, lovesick man they can find.

One of these Brahmins eventually reaches the city where Rutbarn is king. He at once spots the conspicuously lovesick Bahuk-Nal, but Bahuk insists that he is no more than the stable-master of Rutbarn, expert in the business of horses. The Brahmin reports back to Daman, giving her all the details, especially those concerning the horses. She now calls in Sadev, the Brahmin who had found her, and asks him to go to Rutbarn and announce a second *syavamvara* for her, hinting to him that his chances are quite good in the affair. Sadev protests that Rutbarn lives too far away and cannot reach Bidar in a short time. But Daman points out that if Bahuk is really Nal, he will manage the horses in such a way that they will be able to get there with amazing speed. As foreseen, Rutbarn urges Bahuk to arrange the passage, explaining the reasons for the haste. When Bahuk-Nal hears this, his heart sinks and his head begins to swim. Perhaps Daman has thought him faithless and wishes to marry again.

But upon reflection, he wonders if this is not simply a ruse on Daman's part to fetch him back. He agrees to accompany the king, and selects two very thin horses from the stable. The king is initially displeased with his choice of horses but soon acknowledges Bahuk's superior judgment. In fact, the king is so impressed at their speed that he asks Bahuk to teach him the secrets of good horsemanship, including how to distinguish good horses from bad. Bahuk-Nal discloses a good number of his secrets, and the king is so grateful that he volunteers some of his own secret skills in exchange. One of these is to count the leaves and twigs on a tree at a single glance. He also teaches Nal a number of gambling (*qimār-dānī*) tricks. Nal is saddened at having to learn these tricks, which pertain after all to the sphere of trickery and illusion. Still, common sense prevails, and Nal realizes that if he is to win back his kingdom, this is the only solution. Once in Bidar, Rutbarn and Bahuk are surprised not to see any preparations for a *svayamvara*. Daman's father is just as surprised to hear that Rutbarn has arrived in Bidar unannounced. Hastily welcomed, Rutbarn is more than a little embarrassed and makes some lame excuses for his presence.

Daman for her part sends one of her friends to examine Bahuk closely and subject him to a first set of tests. The friend refers to Nal in conversation and Bahuk denies all knowledge of him. But when the general subject of *'ishq* is raised, Bahuk begins to weep bitterly. The friend runs back to report this to Daman, who decides to try one more test. She knows that Nal alone is capable of preparing food without water or fire, and so sends a cooking-pot to Bahuk to see if he can do the same. Sure enough, the black-skinned Bahuk turns out to have the same skills as the noble Nal. Daman is now sure of Nal's identity. She reveals the truth to her brothers and they go at once to meet Nal and embrace him despite his strange appearance. When Daman reports her rediscovery of Nal to her mother, however, she proves rather more skeptical. The mother not only wants to make sure that Bahuk is really Nal, but also that Nal has not changed his mind about her daughter. Nal is invited to the palace and Daman is instructed to interrogate him. Daman's questions and Nal's answers assume the form of riddles. Daman

asks him who he is and why he has come there. Bahuk-Nal replies that he is a lost man, who has no purpose. Why is he black? Because the color of his fortune is black, and this has affected his body as well. Who seeks separation from his own beloved, asks Daman? One who is affected by the frenzy of passion, replies Nal. Why did you abandon the path of *'aql*, asks Daman? Because of the magic of devils, replies Nal. Why did you fall into this situation, asks Daman? Because of my own faults, replies Nal. How did you come here, she asks? Wandering through sands and deserts, he replies.[17] At the end of this interrogation, Daman's mother accepts that the man before them is really Nal. The snake's slough helps Nal regain his own form, and the lovers are reunited at last, and it is like spring once again.

When Rutbarn learns the truth, he proffers his excuses for having treated Nal as his servant. But Nal and Daman tell him they are deeply in his debt; friendly relations are re-established, and after a few days Nal and Daman return to Ujjain with goods and wealth from the latter's father. Nal now calls for his brother and suggests an amicable reconciliation. The younger brother replies with disdain, but agrees to another gambling match. This time Nal, with his new-found skills, wins with ease, and the brother begins to fear that he will be treated as harshly as he had treated Nal. But Nal generously forgives him and allows him to stay on in the kingdom, even giving back his old prebend (*iqta'-i qadām*). Nal is re-established as the king and proceeds to rule in all his glory. Thus, affairs are restored to their normal state. But this time, Faizi insists, there is not only enjoyment but also sagacity (*hūshiyārī*). At the end of all his travails, it is possible for Nal to combine the qualitites of *'ishq* (love) and *shauq* (desire), with the "essence of an awakened itellect" (*jauhar-i 'aql-o-hūsh*). A perfectly equilibrated form of kingship is thus attained.

But the great Mughal poet isn't finished with the story yet, which may perhaps perplex assiduous readers of the Sanskrit epic. For Faizi, one more crucial episode is yet to come. After Nal has reigned for long years, one day in the autumn (*khizān*) he notices that everything has dried up in the garden. No nightingale is to be heard and all the flowers too have withered. Nal begins to mediate and

realizes the transient nature of the life he is living. He calls his oldest son and tells him that the throne is his from that day on. The son begins to weep on hearing this, and so do the other notables (*a'yān*), but Nal is adamant: with the passage of time, such transitions are inevitable in the world. So he places his son on the throne and departs after giving him some sage advice:

Keep generosity and justice ever alive,
And rulership shall always remain with you. [p. 300, v. 5]

Once in the wilderness, Nal's health begins to deteriorate quickly, and he calls for Daman, his beloved, who is still beautiful despite her advanced years. Now is the time for him to make amends. He regrets all the unhappiness that he has caused her in the past and says that he is preparing to leave the earth, with nothing but her *'ishq* as his only possession. But she replies that his dying and leaving her behind is once more nothing but unfaithfulness (*bīwafā'ī*) on his part. How can he talk of separation when they were one life in two bodies? The tenor of Nal's argument now moves from the notion of physical love to that of true love, which we may understand to be akin to the Sufi notion of union. The body is only a veil, and what awaits them is another level of reality. So saying, he closes his eyes and takes his last breath. Daman begins to weep. Then, she gathers together all the dried flowers in the forest and makes a bier of sandalwood. She declares aloud her intention to accompany his caravan, seated on a saddle of fire (*haudaj-i ātishīn*). Sitting on Nal's funeral pyre, she transforms herself spontaneously into flame.

The lover was drunk with the last drops of wine,
while his idol held the cup in her hand.
...
They sat in each other's fire,
and grew hotter than the pyre itself.
...
The idol was burnt from love of the Brahman,
its body now charred like its burnt-out heart.
If the moth was afire on this evening of sorrow,
the candle too burnt from top to toe. [p. 304, vv. 3, 6, 11–12]

As Nal had taken good care of his people and provided for their comfort, his death is universally mourned, as if the Last Judgment had come. The temples become dark and the divine conch falls silent.

The last section of the poem brings a series of general reflections to bear upon the story, in terms of abstractions rather than concrete details. These closing passages could be read in a number of ways, of which one might be to see it within the Persian tradition of the lament (*marsīya*).

O Fayyazi, go beyond this world,
And plant your flag in the next one.
This sky is a board, and its foundation
is the sign of destruction, like color effaced.
The world's existence is a mere illusion,
its roots to be traced in nothingness.
Both new and old are of no importance,
so attach yourself to nothing here. [p. 306, vv. 7–10]

The verses also proffer advice on how to deal with the transient world, knowing well that it is illusory. In the epilogue (*khātima*), Faizi offers some explicit comparisons between his work and that of his illustrious predecessors, including Nizami Ganjawi. The specificity of his Indian metaphors and usages are brought out once again, as is the fact that the text was completed in the thirty-ninth regnal year of Akbar. And so he concludes:

O Fayyazi, on the making of this charm,
how long will you continue to speak?
Far better to draw it to a close,
before you pass yourself into the realm of story.
O, burnt heart, end this tale now.
Stop this story of love, stop. [p. 324, vv. 16–18]

Some Afterthoughts

Faizi's Indo-Persian text *Nal-Daman,* with its innovations and undoubted mastery of poetic technique, seems to have exercised much fascination in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The

distinctive feature of his treatment was his insistence on the delicate line that separated love from excess (or frenzy), with the intellect being the only means of preventing the one from degenerating into the other. On the qualities of kingship, the text offered the sage advice of a poet who could claim to be amongst the respected philosophers of his time. And the poem ends with a brilliant closing section, in which the Indo-Persian poet's fascination with *satī* is combined with the earlier themes, to allow a closure containing an explicitly Sufi viewpoint. In all these respects, Faizi's version sets itself apart from earlier renderings of the text, whether in Persian or the vernaculars, in very few of which politics or kingship are seen as central. In most earlier versions, the themes that stand out are of an existential nature, questions on the nature of identity, transformation and selfhood being clearly present in the double metamorphosis of Nal.

We now turn to the afterlife of Faizi's *Nal-Daman* through a brief reading of Munshi Lal Bhagwant Rai 'Rahat' Kakorwi's *Nal-Daman Hindī*, written in north India and published in 1859, thus immediately after the important political events of 1857–58 (Kakorwi 1859).[18] Bhagwant Rai starts his *masnavī* as follows (with "Hindi" in his version still meaning "Urdu," not only in script but in its heavily Persianized diction):

Jo dekha āj kal hindī ka charchā
Huā dil ek din mushtāq iskā
Ke 'ishq-i-Nal jo thā 'ālam mein mashhūr
Kare hindī zabān mein usko maskūr
Agar che fārsī mein sab bayān hai
Magar tul uskī har ek dāstān hai
Kare tū mukhtasar aisā bayān sab
Khule har ek pe jo raze nihān sab.

Seeing the demand for Hindi in our times,
the desire came upon me one day,
that Nal's love which was famous in this world
should be brought into the Hindi tongue.
Though it has all been told in Persian
yet it's been done at tedious length.

Why not recount it all in brief,
that each reader might grasp the point? [p. 2, vv. 24–28].

The Urdu version does indeed "recount it all in brief," reducing the 4000 verses of the original to less than half that number. Faizi's influence on Bhagwant Rai is evident, both in terms of the organisation of the story and the presence of some key episodes that were Faizi's own innovations, such as the initial praise of *'ishq* (here called *muhabbat*). Bhagwant Rai however does not follow Faizi's development of the idea of two stages of Love, one within the bounds of Reason, and another where Love is transformed into an uncontrollable passion. Nor does he expatiate on another distinction dear to Faizi, and which appears both at the beginning and in the concluding sections of the Persian *Nal-Daman*, namely that between bodily Love and true Love, which is approximated to the Sufi idea of Union. In the Urdu text we pass without clear distinctions between the love of the deer, which seeks its companion in the forest, to the execution of the legendary Mansur because of his declaring: *ana'l-Haqq* ("I am God").

Bhagwant Rai perhaps logically reduces the initial sections of Faizi's text drastically, passing very quickly to a brief description of Hindustan, with only a passing reference to the inferiority of foreign lands (*wilāyat*) before the wonders of Hindustan. But some other verses suggest a more highly developed sense of "patriotism" on the part of our nineteenth-century author than one finds in Faizi, who—we have noted—is not entirely lacking in these sentiments:

It seems to be a part of Paradise,
for the status of this land is towering.
If we were to describe its beauty in detail,
our paper would be transformed into a painting.
In terms of beauty, it has such a name,
that Canaan would do well to be its slave. [p. 3, vv. 7–9]

A few other changes in details are worth mentioning. When Nal falls sick, examining the urine (*qārūra*) does not interest the doctors; they are more preoccupied by the patient's pulse (*nabz*). In

describing Daman's beauty, the emphasis on the appellation "Hindu," in the double sense of "dark," and as a religious category (in opposition to "Musalman") is quite clear. And while the Persian text is content with describing Daman's face and some of her other features, the Urdu text (perhaps under the influence of vernacular poetry) is far more explicit in the detailed physical description of Daman's charms:

The Deccan is a place of wondrous beauty
a colorful garden, full of rose-like faces.
Each of them has a special style,
that drives even the sane mad with love.
But there is one moon-faced one there,
whom the whole world desires to acquire,
If that idol were seen by a pious Muslim,
he would desire her like any Brahmin.
The net (*dam*) she has made with her tresses
has produced her name itself—Daman.
Thousands of Brahmins are mad about her,
and want somehow to approach that silvery idol.
What can I say of the love she inspires,
that black-eyed, black-haired Hindu.
...
Not only will the Hindu die for her tresses,
the Musalman too would sacrifice his faith for it. [p. 5, vv. 2–6, 17].

A later passage illustrates the innovations the Urdu poet has introduced: on the one hand he prefers brevity, on the other hand he dilates on aspects that probably would have made the sixteenth-century poet blush with embarrassment.

On her chest lie two fresh apples,
which no hand has besmirched so far.
Her whole belly is so soft and silky
that it would put ermine itself to shame.
And her waist as thin as a flower-stalk,
has the greatest connoisseurs rapt in wonder.
Her gliding walk undulates

as if she bears her tresses as a weight.
In the belly's river lies a whirlpool,
her navel, that has drowned a thousand hearts.
Beyond this lies the place of shame,
where the pen can find no real place.
That secret place cannot be drawn,
so how can 'Rahat' write of it subtly?
If the poet exercises all his craft
he may give a mere glimpse of it.
The morning's air cannot reach it,
so the flower-bud is yet to open.
Her hips are so very wondrous,
as if the bottom were higher than the top.
What shall I tell you of her thighs?
for they glisten with a delicate light.
When the mirror looks upon their beauty
despairing, he throws his own shine in the dust.
Whoever looks upon the calves of that fairy,
will never again find peace from his unrest.
The henna on the edges of her feet,
has watchers all rubbing their hands in envy. [p. 5, vv. 54–55; p. 6, vv. 1–13]

Thus, variations in the Urdu text occur mostly in providing more concrete details,[19] and a few elements from popular Islam also feature in the Urdu text: for example, Daman is said to have met the legendary Khwaja Khizr on her wanderings before finding her way to the kingdom of her aunt and uncle. While the Urdu text veers toward greater sexual explicitness, at the same time the ninteenth-century poet seems more concerned with propriety when it comes to Daman's own actions. Thus, in the episode where Daman and the bird converse in a corner, the Urdu text has her making rather lame excuses to her friends for why she needs to speak with this messenger. A new ambient morality seems to have set in, making crude concealment necessary. When Daman's father finds out about her secret passion, Bhagwant Rai's version has it that he is afraid of his reputation because his daughter is still too young. The nineteenth-century preoccupation with an appropriate age for marriage has

thus invaded the text, something that did not bother the Mughal poet. Perhaps, the most significant deviation takes place in the description of the union of Nal and Daman after the *svayamvara*, which we have seen is quite charged in Faizi's version. But the Urdu poet, whose language is more uninhibited, takes us further down the road of sexual love, seen from an explicitly and rather aggressively male perspective.

Daman was then brought to his side,
the curtain between them was raised,
When the rituals had been performed,
the place came to be deserted.
When they [were] alone at last in the palace,
Desire put his foot forward boldly.
The lover was now growing impatient,
the wait had been too long for him.
As his hand moved with speed and hope,
it first touched the fresh pomegranate.
Having caressed it a while in lust,
he then bent over the grape-like lips,
to chew upon the pistachio in her mouth,
to taste the pleasure of her apple-like cleft chin.
Having tasted each fruit turn by turn,
he placed his hand at length around her waist.
If she showed some signs of shyness,
he scarcely hesitated.
The silvery branch he drew to his waist,
and joined it to the soaked-through date.
Seeing these two fresh flower-like bodies so,
the candle kept burning there in shame.
When the raindrop approached the oyster's mouth,
the jeweller could not pierce the shell.
The hard diamond which stood in the way
of a sudden became soft, and yielded.
The body that was as flushed as vermilion,
grew pale from the flash of lightning.
The face turned as pale as the moon,
for desire had now at last subsided.

Still he clasped his beloved to his body,
For in his heart, passion still was beating. [p. 16, vv. 2–17].

The Urdu text also deviates somewhat from that of Faizi in bringing back the theme of Kali into the text, with Kali concretely being the snake that bites Nal and transforms him into Bahuk. This is not a full-fledged rehabilitation of the Kali theme into the poem, for Bhagwant Rai still remains faithful to Faizi's conception of love and excess as the principal axis around which to organise the narrative. The sudden introduction of Kali here suggests that the Urdu poet was aware of other versions, and sought in his own way to effect some minor forms of reconciliation.

The colophon of the Urdu text is once again far more modest, and far less abstract than that of Faizi. It reads as follows:

Now I should thank the Creator,
who from nothing brought forth all creation,
This work has been done thanks to Him,
and carried through from beginning to end.
When the *masnavī* was made ready,
I thought someone should examine it.
I took it to a benefactor Kali Prashad,
who heard it and grew very glad.
He reflected upon it with grace,
and said: this story brings comfort.
Whoever reads this *masnavī*,
May God keep him ever content.
So long as the sun shines in the sky,
may this story remain famous in the world.
O cup-bearer! Pour me such a wine
that I may not be intoxicated again.
When I counted out the verses,
they came to a thousand six hundred and seventy-five.

The Urdu poet, almost certainly a Kayastha from nearabouts Lucknow, has thus produced the text on his own initiative, and then taken it to a series of patrons. Besides Kali Prashad mentioned above, we know that the text's printing was subsidised by at least two other

individuals: Lala Jai Narayan and Lala Bakhtawar Singh. The patronage of the Mughal court has passed in symbolic fashion to the merchant (*saudāgar*), but a good part of Faizi's message still retains an interest for nineteenth-century readers.

There has been much debate over the years on the translation of texts from Sanskrit into Persian at the court of Mughal emperors, whether the *Tūtī-Nāma* and other cycles of stories, or esoteric and philosophical texts. In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such "translation" projects (with the word being used in its widest possible meaning) gained massive momentum under the Mughals, for reasons that are of a complex nature. The major Sanskrit epic texts were rendered into Persian, and were at times also drawn upon by chroniclers to provide a history of India in the period before Muslim rule. In some instances, it would appear that these Persian versions enjoyed a great deal of legitimacy even amongst Hindu readers (as is the case with the translation of the *Mahābhārata*), while in others the Persian versions languished for long in obscurity (Shukla and Naini 1979/80). Within this broad context, the case of *Nal-Daman* is a particular one. The text did not have any specific weighty religious connotation, and seems to have been absorbed into the Persian tradition by Faizi as a relatively secular theme upon which he could develop a series of reflections and arguments of his own concerning royal power, the nature of love, and the place of the intellect in managing the affairs of the world. For example, the text never attempts to transform Nal's identity or to present him as anything else other than an idol-worshipper (*but-parast*)—in fact, the poet takes a certain pleasure in playing constantly with metaphors relating to idols, Brahmins and temples and relating them to the lover and beloved. At the same time, in Faizi's view, the problems of kingship are universal, and whether the king is Muslim or not has little bearing on this issue. The advice given by the royal poet could be the advice given by a Sufi to a Mughal ruler. The problems of finding both social balance and empathy with the ruled are universal problems, that call for universal solutions, expressed naturally in the vocabulary of Persian poetry.

What is of interest is the power of the poet's intervention which, if it is partly related to his prestige and that of the Mughal court, is

also largely the consequence of the literary and thematic appeal that his text carried. For many of the literati of northern India then, the story of Nal and Daman (or Nala and Damayanti), would never be the same again after Faizi had remolded it to his own ends. In this sense, the possibility of moving the text from one cosmopolitan language to another opened up a wide horizon of options, at least within the context of the Indian subcontinent. Whether the text found an extensive readership outside India (as Faizi wished it to), for example in Iran or Central Asia, is a question that would bear further investigation. But within the context of Hindustan at least, we must give this important version a place of pride alongside other tellings.

Notes

1. The present essay draws substantially on our earlier publications which appear as Alam and Subrahmanyam 2005, and Alam and Subrahmanyam 2006. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are our own.
2. Thus, eleven manuscripts are reported in the Khuda Bakhsh Library (Patna) alone, thirteen manuscripts at the the Aligarh Muslim University Library, besides several in the British Library's Oriental and India Office Collections (including the oldest extant manuscript dating to 1069 H.). For printed editions, see *Nal Daman-i Fārsī az rashhāt-i qalam-i Abū'l Faiz Faizī,* Lucknow (Naval Kishor), 1877 (reprinted in 1889 and 1930); Tamizuddin Arzan, ed., *Nal Daman*, Calcutta, 1831; the edition from Kanpur of the Nizami Press (1294 H.), and the more recent Iranian edition entitled *Dāstān-i Nal-o-Daman*, Tehran, 1335 Shamsi (1956). One may also consult the facsimile Moscow edition: Abul Faiz Faizi, *Nal'i Daman*, Moscow (Chudoz. Lit.), 1982.82.
3. See Sarawi 1987; and Narang 1962: 17–38. We have briefly analysed that text in Alam and Subrahmanyam 2005: 46–73. Also see, for Hindi versions, Wadley 1999: 26–56.
4. Munshi Bhagwant Rai 'Rahat' Kakorwi, *Nal-Daman Hindī*, Delhi (Matba Indian Punch), 1859 (reprinted 1869; earliest manuscript from 1244 H.). Reported prose versions in Urdu include that by Ilahi Bakhsh 'Shauq' (manuscript in the British Library, dating 1217 H.); a version

by a certain Raghunath, mentioned by Garcin de Tassy; and Talib Banarasi's drama based on *Nal-Daman*, written in 1885, printed by Naval Kishor. Poetic versions include that of Ahmad Sarawi, *Nal Daman*, cited above; one by Mir Niyaz 'Ali Dehlawi 'Nikhat' (manuscript dating to 1256 H., in the Reza Library, Rampur); Mir 'Ali Bangali, *Bahār-i 'ishq*; and Ahmad 'Ali, *Nal Daman* (the last two undated).

5. On the classical Nala-Damayanti story, see the important essay by David Shulman 1994: 1–29. Reprinted in Shulman 2001: 131–58.
6. These reflections draw on Alam 2003: 131–98, and on Alam 1998: 317–49.
7. See, for example, Phukan 1996: 41–54.
8. Faizi's great-grandfather Shaikh Musa had migrated from Yemen to Sind in 900 H. (1494), married and settled there. His son, Shaikh Khizr, then moved to Hindustan proper, where he settled in the western Rajasthan town of Nagaur, and enjoyed extensive contacts with the local *ulamā*. Khizr's son was the celebrated Shaikh Mubarak, born in Nagaur in 1505–06. Khizr himself died in Sind where he had returned for a visit, and after his mother's death, Mubarak moved first to Gujarat, but was advised there to move to the more significant political center of Agra, where he arrived in 1543–44, and married into a respectable family, making his own *madrasa* in the town. For the basic details of Faizi's biography, see Rahman 1999: 457–59, and Ansari 1983: 870–72; and for a more elaborate treatment, Hadi 1978: 81–145.
9. In 999 H. (1590–91), Faizi was sent to Khandesh and Ahmadnagar as Mughal envoy, and wrote a series of celebrated reports, dealing with the political and cultural conditions there, as well as the contemporary situation in Iran. A few years after his return from this extended visit to the Deccan, he fell ill with asthma in 1003 H., and died on 10 Safar 1004 H. (5 October 1595) at Lahore; according to reports, he was buried at first in the Ram Bagh at Agra, but his remains were later transferred to another family mausoleum, near Sikandra. For Faizi's reports, see A.D. Arshad 1973; we have analysed them at length in Alam and Subrahmanyam 2001: 265–307
10. For instance, see Muhammad Taiyab Siddiqui's extensive introduction to his edition of *Mathnavī Nal-Daman Faizī*, pp. 1–94.
11. See the series of essays deriving from his earlier (unpublished) doctoral dissertation on the text: Desai 1958a: 43–56; Desai 1958b: 81–96 and Desai 1958c: 183–98.
12. Faizi certainly knew the *Mahābhārata* of Vyasa, and had participated

in the enterprise to edit the Persian version produced at Akbar's court under the direction of Mir Ghiyas-ud-Din 'Ali Naqib Khan Qazwini, sometimes entitled the *Razm Nāma*. Thus, any departure from the received version must be seen as deliberate, rather than based on ignorance or carelessness.

13. The parallel with Akbar's visits to the shrine of the Sufi saint Mu'in-ud-Din Chishti at Ajmer could not have been missed by readers at the Mughal court.
14. On the broader *nasīhat* tradition in the early modern Islamic world also see Tietze 1979–82.
15. For example, the ruler must combine harmony with firmness, never hesitating to intervene when he feels there is an offence (*jurm*) being committed. For the key quality for a king is neither his genealogy, nor his wealth, but his justice (*dād*); it is thus that he may hope to be perceived favorably by the people at large. The king does not become great by impeding the caravan's passage or seeking to tax it, but rather by helping it on its way with his generosity. For a broader discussion of such literature, also see Alam, "Akhlāqi Norms and Mughal Governance," in Alam 2000 and Alvi 1989.
16. These passages can be compared to those in a roughly contemporary text, the Telugu *Prabhāvati Pradyumnamu* of Pingali Suranna, for which see Shulman and Rao 2006: 45–47.
17. Compare Shulman 2001: 137–42.
18. The original lithograph is not explicitly paginated, and in the paragraphs that follow, we follow its sequence. The page numbers are thus attributed by us.
19. For example, in the episode of the exchanged letters, the Urdu text notes that they were put inside envelopes (*lifāfā*), something that Faizi does not mention.

Nal and Damayanti's Reversals of Fortune: Perspectives on When a Woman Should Know Better

Lindsey Harlan

Scholarly assessments of the story of the handsome king Nal and his loving queen Damayanti in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* have varied dramatically.[1] Madeleine Biardeau (1984, 1985), for example, represents the story as being essentially focused on Damayanti, who "dominates the dramatic action."[2] Hans van Buitenen concurs, saying, "In spite of its traditional name it is much more the story of Damayanti than of Nala... From the beginning Damayanti is the center of attention" (1975:183). John D. Smith has taken exception to this characterization and asserted that "the story is precisely the story of Nala"[3] and that although Nal is passive, "in India passivity is by no means incompatible with heroic status" (1992:27–28).

Stephanie Jamison takes a view that reconciles to some extent these countervailing evaluations. Agreeing that Damayanti is the focus of the story, she also hints at why it is that a hero would be portrayed as passive in comparison to his wife. In the introduction to *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife*, she notes that the ancient Sanskrit texts, taken together, present polar views of women (1996:15). There are the many passages representing the female as weak/stupid and recommending her restraint. The best-known, of course, is Manu IX. 3: "Her father guards her in girlhood; her husband guards her in youth; her sons guard her in old age. A woman does not deserve

independence."[4] Then there are passages representing the female as strong/clever; these are most common in narratives. Foremost among the stories attesting to this alternative assessment is the story of Nal and Damayanti. As Jamison writes,

> ... anyone with a passing acquaintance with Sanskrit literature, indeed anyone who has studied first-year Sanskrit in the traditional way with the story of Nala and Damayanti, has met... what I will call... the Smart Woman/ Feckless Man syndrome. The Vedas and epics abound in stories of resourceful, energetic, and verbally and dharmically accomplished women, coupled with weak or dilatory men... In story after story women see what needs to be done, take command, and order the bewildered, hand-wringing male participants into their supporting roles—and the enterprise fails only when one of these ninnies messes up his part of the woman's plan. (Nala is a prime example.) (1996:15)

Jamison goes on to speculate about the source for the impetus to represent women as intelligent and able to take charge: she locates its source in men's anxiety about sexual relations with women. Because of the texts' emphasis on asceticism, men are often represented as being unenthusiastic about sex. Men need sons to perform the ancestral rites, but coitus imperils their pursuit of liberation. Having discussed the well-known compromises (the *ásram* scheme and the norm of alternating between celibacy and intercourse during a wife's monthly cycle), Jamison explains that in ancient texts men can be credited with retaining the ascetic inclination while performing their necessary duties if they are not the initiators, but rather the passive recipients, of sex (1996:16). In essence, they are victims of sexuality, which is primarily vested and manifested in women. Once women are shown as initiators, as agents, then Pandora's box is open: they can be represented as "taking charge" in other spheres and activities (1996:17).

By this reckoning Nala is "a ninny" in Damayanti's shadow, not the dramatic star portrayed by Smith, and he is also passive, a quality which both Jamison and Smith would find appropriate for a man like Nala. My purpose here is not to join the debate about

who gets primary billing and whether or not Nala is "a gifted man" or a "ninny" in this Sanskrit tale, though to be sure I am tempted: I recall with great fondness this story that served for me (like so many others) as an initiation into the world of Sanskrit literature. Rather, my focus in this essay will be two vernacular accounts I collected during fieldwork in Rajasthan. The accounts demonstrate rather vividly that scholars are not the only ones who find reason to debate prominence and dominance as well as the issue of character in the matter of Nala and Damayanti. For example, in the first telling I discuss, which was narrated by a Rajput woman in Udaipur, Nal comes off rather badly: he is shallow, arrogant, and above all, foolish. Moreover, Damayanti has to tell him what to do in order to get out of a fix that any reasonably informed king would not get himself into. In the second telling, which I have translated from a pamphlet written by a man whose name is very much Brahman, Nal is noble and generous, though fairly unimportant compared to Damayanti, who is shallow, arrogant, and foolish (Sharma n.d.). Many other differences of perspective will become apparent as I summarize these tellings, but to focus solely on the differences would be to miss the ways in which both stories manage to convey the same fundamental messages about responsibility and blame. Both tellings subtly pose the question: should a woman always do what her husband wants or should she sometimes know better?

The first telling was told to me by Prem Rani Sa,[5] a member of the erstwhile aristocracy of Mewar, a princely state whose capital was Udaipur. I had been living in Udaipur and researching a book on women's narrative traditions (Harlan 1992) for almost a year when the festival of Dasa Mata, "Mother Fate," took place. During this festival, married women perform a *vrat* (literally, "vow"), a form of religious devotion in which participants fulfill a promise to a deity that they will fast for a certain period and engage in prescribed forms of worship. For Dasa Mata's *vrat*, which is performed every spring in the part of Rajasthan in which I worked, women fast during daylight hours for nine days, then feast on the tenth. During the ten

days they recite ten stories about Dasa Mata, including the story of Nal and Damayanti.[6]

On the final day of the *vrat*, the women worship the pipal tree, which is sacred to Dasa Mata. At the base of the tree they offer tiny images of items associated with good fortune and prosperity. Fashioned from chickpea flour, these images represent the various types of jewelry worn by *suhāgins* (women whose husbands are living). Also presented are images of elephants and horses, indicative of success and status for husbands.[7] Women who have performed this *vrat* wear thread necklaces made of unrefined cotton. Once they have put on the thread, they are not supposed to remove it, for it represents unswerving loyalty to Dasa Mata as well as their status as *suhāgins*.[8]

During the ten days of Dasa Mata's *vrat* I had been traveling and was thus unable to observe the entire festival being performed in any one place. I listened to story recitations wherever I could and made some tape recordings, the quality of which were abysmal.[9] Just after I returned to my home base in Udaipur, I was visiting Prem Rani Sa, a Rajput woman in her mid fifties, who obviously enjoyed our various chats about religious matters. When I told her about my frustration in not having been able produce a clear recording of Dasa Mata's stories, she readily volunteered to recite for me the ten stories she knew.

During two three-hour sessions she related these stories in Hindi. As she narrated them, her enthusiasm never waned. From time to time her husband, an amiable, mustached man who, like many aristocratic men, was passionate about Rajput history but not terribly interested in women's stories, occasionally dropped in to listen for a few moments and nod approvingly: he was obviously proud of his wife's knowledge about such matters. I sat in their comfortable whitewashed house, which was full of military objects, history books, and religious images, as my hostess enlightened me about Dasa Mata, stopping every once in a while to ask her daughter to bring us more tea. The longest story she told was Nal-Damayanti and it was clear from both her words and

her delivery that she considered Damayanti a long-suffering if imperfect heroine, whose husband had a lot to learn. Her version of this story is far too lengthy to be presented in its entirety. What follows is a summary of main events, which includes details bearing on the thesis of this essay.

First Telling

Nal and Damayanti were the king and queen of Navalgadh. They were playing *caupaṛ*[10] when from below the palace came the sounds of women singing songs sacred to Dasa Mata. Damayanti asked her maidservant, "Where is the *pūjā* (ritual of veneration) going on?" and the maidservant said "Today is Dasa Mata's day, so all the women are going to do *pūjā* at a pipal tree."

Then Damayanti said, "What's to be gained from doing that *pūjā*?" and the servant replied, "It leads to good fortune (*dasā*). For this reason women perform Dasa Mata's *vrat*, do *pūjā* at the pipal tree, and put on Dasa Mata's thread." Damayanti responded, "It should be a good day for me too."[11] Then she performed Dasa Mata's *vrat*, worshipped the pipal tree, and put on Dasa Mata's thread.

That night when the king came in and visited his wife in her chambers, he saw the thread on her neck and said "Ugh! That thing on your neck is ugly. You have a golden one worth a lakh (rupees 100,000): wear that!" Damayanti protested, but Nal refused to allow her to wear it, saying "It's the worst!" He tore it off her neck, threw it on the ground, then picked it up and tossed it in the fire.

Later on, Damayanti had a dream in which a voice called to her and said, "Hey queen, your thread has been broken and thrown away. Now the fortune I would have given you will vanish from your home. When you awake in the morning you and the king will have a desire for common food. Also one of the turrets of your fortress will crumble and fall. These will be signs that bad times are on the way."

In the morning Damayanti and Nal had cravings for the kinds of food sold by peddlers, sesame and chickpea snacks. Also, a turret crashed. She warned her husband, "You broke my thread and now bad times have come: you'd better be careful." Nevertheless, that evening Nal gambled at *caupaṛ* with an opponent who kept winning. Frustrated by his losses, Nal staked his whole kingdom and lost. His opponent became

king.[12] Nal and Damayanti went into exile, bringing along their twin sons, Sayar and Nir, as well as their maidservant and a horse. The palace gardener asked them to spend the night in the garden before beginning their journey. They agreed, but as they rested, the whole garden dried up. Nal said, "This is bad fortune: my staying here has dried everything up." They left.

The next night they came across a potter, who invited them to spend the night. Then the king stopped at the potter's house, however, all the potter's pots (*maṭkās*) broke. So the king left.

After a time Nal came across an old friend, a *baniyā* (merchant) who invited him and his family to stay with him. When Nal went to bed, a peacock-shaped hook on the wall swallowed a necklace that was hanging on it. The necklace was worth nine lakhs.[13] The queen saw this happen and thought to herself, "Now they'll call me a thief. They'll say I took the necklace." So they fled.

Eventually they stopped to rest in the shade of a pipal tree. The boys cried because of their hunger. So Nal went off to ask for alms. The queen went fishing and managed to catch a fish, but then it jumped back into the water. Meanwhile the pipal tree's trunk split open and engulfed the horse. Then a gypsy troupe stole the boys. The king returned with some rice but when Damayanti looked at it, she saw that it was full of bugs. Just then there was a loud slap on the water and the servant disappeared into the river.

There was nothing to do but go on with their journey. In time they came to Nal's sister's house. His sister said, "My brother always comes here riding an elephant and surrounded by servants—how is it that he's coming as a beggar? Let him stay outside by the well." She only sent him five *roṭīs* [wholewheat circular breads] and some onion for dinner.[14] When Nal accepted this inferior food, Damayanti became indignant: she threw the food into a trench. They left without eating.

A storm came up just as they reached a fork in the road. The wind blew the king and queen down different roads, which ultimately led to the same place, but still the couple did not meet. Damayanti took a job as an attendant to a prostitute. Some time later she learned that Nal lived in town and she contacted him, but he replied, "Don't tell anyone your name or come to me because I can't feed you. The king here is having a *svayamvara* (a ceremony in which a princess chooses her husband). That day it will have been a year since our trouble began."

When that day arrived Damayanti did Dasa Mata's *vrat* and *pūjā*. She prayed to Dasa Mata for forgiveness, saying, "Dasa Mata, I made a mistake. Please return my good fortune." Dasa Mata appeared to her in a dream and said, "Now your good fortune will gradually return, but you must continue with your worship." Damayanti agreed.

The queen went to Nal and told him he must also worship Dasa Mata. He agreed and said, "This time I will make no mistake. Wear your thread: I give you my permission."

The *svayamvara* took place and all the kings came. The princess agreed to marry the person on whose shoulders an elephant dropped a betrothal garland. The elephant selected Nal. The crowd struck Nal, who appeared to be merely a beggar, and threw him into the jungle. But two more times the elephant found Nal and selected him. The crowd said, "Oh well, this is surely written into the princess' fate."[15] Nal married her and moved into her palace.

After some time Nal's new wife became ill. Her mother asked Nal who his family's guardian goddess (*kuldevī*) and god (*kuldevtā*) were and what offerings they desired.[16] Nal didn't know, so he said to some servants, "My first wife is working for a prostitute; go ask her about our goddess and find out what special offerings she takes."

Damayanti informed them how to worship the gods properly. The servants told the queen that the wife with whom they had spoken talked like a queen and said her husband is King Nal. The queen then sent for Damayanti and, having venerated her, joined her in worshipping the *kuldevī*, *kuldevtā*, and Dasa Mata.

Nal was given a parasol [signifying royal status], wealth, soldiers, and servants, everything he would need [for his return home]. On the way home, they met Nal's sister, who was very happy and welcomed him. The sister sent out good food and when Damayanti complained about the food they were given previously, she was told that the coarse food had changed into gold coins and jewelry.[17] Later, Nal's party arrived at the pipal tree near the river. The maidservant came back out of the water and the horse emerged from the tree.

That night the gypsy troupe was camped nearby and the boys were caring for the animals and keeping watch during the night. The queen heard their voices and called out to them. She established her claim to being the boys' mother when her breasts spurt milk into her sons' mouths.

The travelers journeyed to the merchant's house. The merchant accused Nal of being a thief, but when Nal went into the house, the necklace

reappeared. Then the party met the potter, to whom Nal gave great wealth so that he was very happy. The party then spent a night in the garden, which turned green. Nal waged a war against the king who had taken his kingdom and won. He again became king of Navalgadh.

In this story Damayanti knows better than to abandon her vow to Dasa Mata. Her servant has informed her that the purpose of performing the *vrat* is to gain good fortune. It is common knowledge that abandoning a vow to a deity is not a good thing to do: it brings about bad luck and invites divine vengeance. Moreover, this deity is specifically in charge of conferring good fortune. Abandoning one's commitment to Dasa Mata is sure to bring misery.

Another implicit assumption is that for wives good fortune means *saubhāgya*, which guarantees a living, thriving, and happy husband. A wife's status and fortune depend on having a husband who prospers and, being content, treats her with affection. Thus, in allowing Nal to destroy her Dasa Mata thread Damayanti risks not only her own welfare but also the welfare of her husband, upon whom her welfare depends. This is not to say that she might have been able to successfully resist her husband's actions. After all, he did rip it off her neck and then burn it. Rather, it is to say that she is responsible for his disastrous actions because she is responsible for her own *saubhāgya*. Logically, assigning responsibility for one's actions means that one has choice. If Damayanti is at fault, then somehow she could have and should have been able to prevent Nal's rash destruction of the string that protected them. Damayanti recognizes this when she says to Dasa Mata, "I made a mistake. Please return my good fortune."[18]

Does this avowed culpability make Damayanti a villain in this story? Certainly not. She is clearly the heroine and a sympathetic one at that. She is noble, loyal, and long-suffering. Moreover, she is obedient, as wives are supposed to be. As noted, it is never suggested that she could actually have prevented Nal's impetuous destruction of her thread, even if she admits responsibility on that account. She tried to persuade him to let her keep the thread, but failed—what else could she have done except wrestle him for it? This would hardly

have been a recourse in a culture that values wifely submission and self-restraint. Faced with Nal's objection to her wearing Dasa Mata's string, Damayanti is wedged between a rock and a hard place. Both resisting Nal's order and not resisting it will reflect badly on her.

Ironically, it is Damayanti's unflagging obedience that makes her so very heroic. She minds her husband, whatever the consequences. This continues to be apparent as the story unfolds. Like the devoted princess Sita who follows her husband into the forest or even more like Queen Draupadi who follows her husbands into the forest after they gamble away their kingdom, she epitomizes the manifold virtue of *pativratya*, loyalty to a husband. The narrator presents her as an utterly sympathetic character: a devoted wife who uncomplainingly suffers the consequences of having a bumbling husband. It was clear from her delivery that she identified with Damayanti and admired her ability to accept and endure hardship.

Nal, on the other hand, does not come off as a particularly sympathetic character. His foolish destruction of Damayanti's thread is the proximate and obvious cause of their descent into wretched poverty and homelessness. Moreover, he compounds his folly by refusing to heed Damayanti's warning to be careful after the thread's destruction. Paying her no attention, he gambles recklessly and loses everything. At best he is a slow learner.

Ignorance is not Nal's only flaw. He is also proud and shallow. He does not understand that his wife's thread is worth far more than an expensive gold necklace. Instead he must learn about value the hard way. He acquires the reverse Midas touch: ruining everything he touches. He does seem to learn something from this condition, however. When the gardener's grounds wither, Nal blames himself, which means he implicitly recognizes his error in interfering with his wife's practice of the Dasa Mata *vrat*. Still, he does not metamorphose into a valiant hero in this story. For one thing, he is not particularly attentive to Damayanti. In fact, he marries another woman and does not even bother to retrieve Damayanti from her lowly life as a prostitute's attendant until his new wife gets sick and needs help. As is clear in another telling of the story (which will be

recounted shortly), a second marriage is a catastrophe for the first wife: it means sharing a husband's attentions with another woman, someone perhaps younger and more appealing. In the telling above Damayanti receives word of her husband's hopes of engagement without comment, but in the second telling, the prospect of Nal's remarriage upsets her terribly. In this telling Damayanti asks Nal what sin she has committed that he has decided to take another wife. That Nal's impending remarriage receives no comment from Damayanti in the first telling might well indicate that remarriage needs no comment: it stands as an indictment of Damayanti, who, as we have seen, confesses responsibility for her bad fortune.

Another factor that keeps Nal from being a very sympathetic character is that although he finally realizes that destroying Dasa Mata's thread was a mistake, he remains fairly clueless in other respects. Perhaps nowhere in the story is the contrast between the wise Damayanti and the ignorant Nal more clear than in the episode in which his second wife becomes sick. When Nal's new mother-in-law asks him who his family's guardian goddess is, he cannot come up with an answer. Nal does not know the name of his *kuldevī* or of his *kuldevtā*, the foremost guardians of his line.[19]

One thing is clear: without Damayanti, Nal is in deep trouble. He lacks even the most fundamental inkling about the basics of religious devotion. How could he possibly manage without her? His religious ignorance suggests resistance to the characterization of women as uninformed and concerned only with trifling household matters. In this telling the king depends on his queen to manage their religious affairs. In the end, the two queens' worship of the *kuldevī*, *kuldevtā*, and Dasa Mata confirms the return of good fortune previously made possible by Damayanti's lone *pūjā* and sets them and their husband on the road back to their husband's kingdom.

Nal now seems willing to accept his reliance on Damayanti in matters of devotion. When it comes time for Damayanti to perform the ritual after a year has passed, Nal indicates his intention of allowing Damayanti to perform the ritual and wear her string when he says: "This time I will make no mistake." But then he adds, "I

give you my permission." Thus while acknowledging Damayanti's superior wisdom in this respect, he also subtly reestablishes the fact that she requires his permission to do what is so obviously wise. Affirming the norm of wifely obedience, he claims responsibility for the course she is taking, while implicitly reintroducing the old double-bind: a woman who knows better than to listen to her husband is damned if she does and damned if she doesn't. Good wives should and should not let their husbands make silly mistakes.[20]

At this point let us turn to the second telling, which portrays the king and queen quite differently. This narrative I found printed in a Hindi pamphlet entitled "Queen Dasa's *Vrat*." It contained ritual instructions for performing Dasa Mata worship followed by ten stories, beginning with Nal-Damayanti. This pamphlet by Ram Ji Sharma was given to me by an octogenarian Rajput noblewoman who was widely respected for her piety and regarded as especially knowledgeable about religious matters. Printed in Allahabad, the pamphlet is readily available in Udaipur and I saw copies of it in the homes of other women I visited in the course of my research. The *vrat* begins with specific instructions about the performance of the Dasa Mata rituals, then turns to the story of Nal-Damayanti. The story is not at first recognizable as such. It begins, as so many women's stories do, "In a house lived a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law." The story looks very much like one of the frame stories so prominent in epics, one whose plot impinges significantly on the main story, the story of Nal and Damayanti. Once again, what follows is a rather spartan summary.

Second Telling

In a house lived a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law. Having learned that women in the village near which they lived were all performing the Dasa Mata *vrat*, they decided to do so also. After completing the rituals of the ten days, they were just about to begin eating their ritual feast [*prasād*, food consercrated by first being offered to the goddess] when the mother-in-law's son returned from a foreign land where he had been for twelve

years. He called to his mother from the threshold of the house, but hearing his voice, the mother thought to herself, "What harm is there in letting him wait. After I finish eating, I'll open the door." The wife, however, didn't have the strength to resist his summons. She flung her plate away, scattering bits of her meal everywhere, and went to the door to let him in. Her husband asked her, "Where's my mother?" And the wife told him that his mother was eating her Dasa Mata feast. The husband told her that he wouldn't drink water from her hands because he had been away twelve years and couldn't be sure how she had kept herself [whether she remained loyal and chaste]. He said he'd wait for his mother to bring him some water.

After the mother greeted her son and brought him water, she served him some food, but as he did so the little bits of food that had been scattered from his wife's plate started jumping around. He said, "What's this spectacle?" and his mother said "What do I know? Ask your wife." The husband became very angry at this and said, "I won't have anything to do with this wife to whose character you cannot bear witness. Throw her out!" The mother then tried to intercede on her daughter-in-law's behalf but to no avail. She told the daughter-in-law to stand outside while she tried to smooth things over. But when the daughter-in-law tried to take shelter in the shed, the shed told her it wouldn't provide refuge to an enemy of Dasa Mata. She went to the nearby well-platform, but it told her to go away as she was too much of a burden. Wherever she went, she had to leave, so she wound up wandering in the jungle. Eventually, she fell into a well and couldn't get out.

A while later, Raja Nal, who was out hunting, arrived at the well, rescued her, declared that he was now her adoptive brother [literally, her *dharma bhāī*], and brought her back to his kingdom. Seeing Nal return with this woman, Damayanti became very sad, thinking that he had brought home another wife. She pleaded with Nal to reveal to her what sin she had committed that he had married again. Nal explained that this woman was not a co-wife but rather a sister-in-law.

Some time passed and on a certain day, at a very auspicious moment, one of the king's horses gave birth to its first colt. Nal's adoptive sister told Damayanti that they should perform Dasa Mata's *vrat* because it is customary to perform the *vrat* whenever a horse, cow, or woman gives birth to a first son. But Damayanti responded, "I'm a queen who eats fried bread and rice pudding" [literally, a *pūrī*-and-*khīr*-eating mahārānī]. She refused to eat the simple fare consumed in the feast.

When her adoptive sister-in-law explained that failing to worship Dasa Mata properly was what caused all her misfortune, Damayanti said that what had happened to the sister-in-law had nothing to do with her and that she wasn't interested in worshipping Dasa Mata. The *dharma* sister performed the *vrat* alone and on the tenth day her husband came for her. Disguised as an ascetic, he questioned various people about his wife's reputation and learned that she was esteemed as a noble and religiously devout woman, and he determined to get her back. He went to the palace to ask for alms, but when he was served, he refused to accept them from anyone but the virtuous *dharma* sister. He was informed, however, that she was in the midst of consuming her feast on the last day of Dasa Mata's vow and that he would have to wait. When she finished, she came out to give the ascetic pearls as alms, but immediately recognized her husband through his disguise. The couple was happily reunited and he brought her home in a palanquin with great pomp and show.

The daughter-in-law then began to live happily, but Nal's situation became very bad. The king and his wife became beggars garbed in filthy rags. Nal told Damayanti he could no longer bear living in his kingdom and that they would have to leave. The queen, being devoted to her husband [literally, being a *pativratā*], obeyed her husband's order and accompanied him. Whatever the king and queen touched turned to iron.

At this point the narrative begins to resemble strongly the one already given. Nal and Damayanti endure various reversals of fortune. The misadventures include missing out on a fish dinner, being served inedible food by Nal's sister, and watching a necklace disappear while staying at a friend's house. Then the story line departs significantly from previous telling's. Nal and Damayanti together arrive at a kingdom and go to the palace to beg for alms. The story continues:

When the couple arrived, the time for almsgiving had just ended and the officials at the palace only had a handful of chickpeas left so that's what they offered them. Insulted, Nal and Damayanti refused to accept this coarse food and verbally abused the alms manager. Thinking these beggars too proud, the alms manager threw them into jail and gave them only chickpeas to eat while they lived there.

One day Damayanti learned from a sweeper woman that the king's horse had just delivered its first-born colt at an auspicious time. She told

Nal that since the time she had shown disrespect for Dasa Mata's thread, their fate had become bad. Lacking the usual worship materials, Damayanti said that she would take Dasa Mata's thread and leave the rest up to Dasa Mata. Taking nine threads from her husband's turban and one thread from her sari, she fashioned a Dasa Mata thread and began to perform the Dasa Mata vow by fasting.

After some time, the king happened by on his way to see the new colt and saw the couple in jail. Having inquired as to the reason for their imprisonment, he decided to release them and as soon as he did, he recognized them. Having treated them generously, he sent them home with elephants, horses, and an army.

Now the narrative retraces the couple's steps and describes the undoing of all the damage caused by bad fortune. The king and queen return home and prepare to resume their happy life:

When Nal and Damayanti arrived, they immediately made arrangements for Dasa Mata *pūjā* and invited all the women with living husbands (*saubhāgyavatīs*). Raja Nal gave the order that from then on all his subjects were to perform Dasa Mata's *vrat.*

Strategically employing a frame story, this narrative offers mutually reinforcing portrayals of wifely responsibility. Unlike the first telling, in which Damayanti tries but fails to adhere to the stipulations of Dasa Mata worship, the second telling presents two women who renounce her worship willingly. The anonymous daughter-in-law, who functions as a multiform of Damayanti, abandons her intention of completing her vow and wearing her string because after waiting twelve years for her husband to come home, she cannot summon the strength to ignore his call from the doorstep. Whereas her mother-in-law figures he can wait while she finishes her ritual meal, she leaps up, spilling bits of consecrated bread, and rushes to the door like an excited puppy whose master has returned. Her obedience is blind.

This multiform mediates between the Damayanti of telling one, who tries to dissuade Nal from interfering with her Dasa Mata devotions but believes she must obey his command, and the

Damayanti of telling two, who is not the least bit interested in worshipping Dasa Mata and will not fast or feast for her husband's benefit: she is too accustomed to feeding herself luxurious foods.[21] Whereas the first Damayanti is sympathetically portrayed as a woman who could hardly escape culpability, the second Damayanti is not portrayed in a sympathetic light: shallow and ignorant, her acts resembles Nal's in telling one. There is little ambiguity in her position: she has no one to blame for her folly but herself. The spoiled, fried-bread-and-rice-pudding-eating queen gets what she deserves.

By comparison, and perhaps only by comparison, the daughter-in-law of the frame story comes across well. She offends Dasa Mata, but only because she wants to attend to her husband who, after all, has been away on an epic-length sojourn. Nevertheless, she is not portrayed as sympathetically as the first narrative's Damayanti. Whereas that Damayanti is forbidden to fulfill her duty to Dasa Mata, this woman is never specifically prohibited by her husband from fulfilling her duty: she simply forgets about Dasa Mata when her husband calls.

If neither of the female protagonists in this telling seem as noble as the first Damayanti, it is surely partly due to the fact that the second narrative presents us with an absolutely wonderful Nal who is the epitome of virtue and wisdom. He rescues a damsel in distress and mandates that everyone worship Dasa Mata in his kingdom. Moreover, he does not gamble away his kingdom. Instead, he loses everything wholly because of his wife's bad behavior. This noble Nal makes Damayanti seem especially spoiled.

Mediating between the foolish Nal of telling one and the wise Nal of telling two is the nameless husband in the frame story. On one hand, he seems unkind and unfair. Almost as soon as he returns from travels that took him away from his wife for twelve years, he declares her unfit and has her thrown out of her house. On the other hand, he seems justified in condemning his wife after she abandons her Dasa Mata ritual. How could he keep her in her house after she behaved so abominably? If she could not complete her devotions properly, how could she be trusted to be a devoted and

chaste wife? Even the mother-in-law, who ultimately tries to defend her daughter-in-law, first says she cannot attest to the girl's character. The husband's abandonment of his wife in the forest after his mother will not bear witness to her purity is reminiscent of Ram's abandonment of Sita in the forest after people speculate about her chastity following her abduction by the demon Ravana.[22] Given this widely-known mythic parallel, which could even be functioning here as an implicit paradigm, it is scarcely surprising that the unfortunate wife ends up wandering alone in the wilderness.

It is tempting to push the *Rāmāyaṇa* comparison further. Ram manages to abandon Sita and keep her too: he has an image of Sita by his side throughout her absence. Nal also manages to abandon his wife and keep her: this time he is the one represented by an image, his multiform, who is responsible for the abandonment, whereas he sticks with Damayanti through thick and thin. The splitting of Nal enables the Nal so named to be utterly kind while his double does the dirty work.[23]

Why does this story seem so adamant about Nal's goodness and blamelessness? It certainly suggests a perspective that is male and Brahmanical. Whereas the three Rajasthani tellings of the Nal-Damayanti story with which I am familiar (telling one above and the two tellings discussed in Ann Gold's essay in this volume) portray Damayanti as possessing superior wisdom and virtue, this Allahabad telling portrays the leading ladies as silly and self-absorbed, if not downright selfish. The superiority of male wisdom is shown in the first story when the husband throws his wife out for her ritual offense and in the second story when Nal proclaims that all people must perform Dasa Mata's ritual.

The men's rigid insistence about the importance of proper ritual performance seems especially Brahmanical. The pamphlet begins with very detailed prescriptions about the specifics of ritual performance and advises readers about the consequences of failing to perform the ritual correctly. It warns that if fate is slighted in this way, even good actions (karma) bring about bad results.[24] Closely associated with this emphasis on ritual performance is the motif of

ritual purity that is patent in this second telling, though not at all emphasized in the first.

The importance of purity is most evident in the frame story. The impetuous wife pollutes her feast by scattering on the floor bits of consecrated bread, which then complain about her to her husband by jumping about. Having been inattentive to the rules of purity, she is considered polluted by her husband, who will not accept water from her. People from whom one cannot accept water do not belong in one's house. Hence, she is cast out into the forest. Unlike the Nal-Damayanti stories, in which both husband and wife are exiled, she and she alone suffers banishment. Careless about ritual purity, she deserves to lose her husband, a message that is subtly reinforced in the Nal-Damayanti plot that follows. There Damayanti's sin has nothing to do with pollution. The queen does not pollute the ritual. She simply fails to perform it. While this is bad enough, it does not cause her to be declared unfit to serve and sent away from her husband.

In the telling told by the Rajput woman, the motif of ritual purity does not receive much attention. Dasa Mata's thread is polluted, but the nature of the crime for which the couple suffers seems largely to be a lapse in loyalty to the goddess. Moreover, the perpetrator of the offense is Nal: he throws the thread on the ground. The pollution caused by this act would doubtless be considered purified by its subsequent cremation, but this hardly seems the point. Burning the thread makes it permanently unavailable, whereas a dropped thread can be ritually reconsecrated.[25] The necessity for guarding purity is simply not a dominant message in the tale told by the Rajput noblewoman.

Another theme that is common in Brahminical literature is foregrounded, however. Like the Allahabad pamphlet, the Rajput woman's story is quite concerned with status and the loss thereof. Status is often correlated with ritual purity, though such correlation has often been shown to be troublesome, especially in the case of Rajputs and other Kshatriyas, who have high status yet engage in many activities that would be considered polluting to higher and lower caste members.[26] In the frame story, there is no explicit mention of a loss of caste status (we are given neither information

on their caste affiliation or their names, which could well provide some indication of caste affiliation), though fear of such a loss is perhaps implicit in the decision to throw out a wife whose touch pollutes. Rather, loss of status is explicitly tied to the consumption of poor-quality food, which seems both a cause and result of loss of status. Fried bread and rice pudding are lost with privilege and position. Hounded by fate, the now-rendered-lowly folks eat lowly foods, which are not by nature polluting, but rather déclassé.[27]

Eating foods that are too expensive for inferior people to afford or too refined for inferior people to appreciate is a well-known marker of elevated status and privilege. The Damayanti in telling two makes explicit her superiority to her nameless adopted sister-in-law when she says about the coarse feast food: "May your *vrat* bear fruit... It would be terrible for me to eat that food!" The Nal in telling one, who thinks his wife is too good to wear a string around her neck, loses his sense of culinary discrimination and condemns himself and his wife to craving common foods. In both tellings, the couples end up eating chickpeas, food for common people and criminals.[28]

The couple's fall from position and privilege is made symbolically clear in version one. A shared desire for coarse food is accompanied by the destruction of a turret. As an omen, the turret would seem to serve through synecdoche for the entire palace, which is not destroyed, but is utterly lost to Nal and Damayanti. Together the lowly food and fallen turret portend the series of reversals of fortune that render Nal and Damayanti abject beggars at the doors of the gardeners, potters, and merchants they once ruled, and then ultimately lead them to taking professions that are almost incomparably lowly: in telling one Damayanti works as a prostitute's assistant and Nal begs while in telling two both are beggars *cum* criminals.

Although loss of social status is an important motif in and of itself, it ought not to be considered utterly apart from the context in which the loss occurs. This is a story about fate and more importantly, the possibility of achieving a better—or worse—fate through devotion to the Goddess of Fate, Dasa Mata. Loss of good fortune preconditions the loss and regaining of status. In both

tellings, the preeminent value is auspiciousness (*saubhāgya*), which is secured by fate (*dasa*), which is in turn enacted or altered by a deity. Having a husband with a long and happy life, bearing and keeping sons, enjoying prosperity, and consuming lots of good food are all part of the auspiciousness that comes from worshipping this goddess. Nal and Damayanti's story is a commentary on auspiciousness and the Dasa Mata ritual, which includes offering the Goddess chickpea-paste emblems of auspiciousness, is designed to secure the good life.

Because in both tellings devotion to Dasa Mata is flawed, a price has to be paid. There is no indication of divine vengeance. Rather, Dasa Mata is simply inattentive or absent, as a result of which *saubhāgya* is lacking. The loss of status that the king and queen endure because of their errors conforms to a pattern that suffuses narratives of devotion (*bhakti*). When pride stands in the way of devotion, as it certainly does in the case of the snobby Nal who wants his wife to wear gold, and the "caviar and champagne" queen Damayanti, the mighty must fall. This king and queen must learn a lesson and those who listen to the story must learn from their folly and not let pride get in the way of their devotion. Everyone must discover the value of chickpeas, which seem to be the chief ingredient in Rajasthani humble pie.[29]

Thus in the Nal-Damayanti story, auspiciousness appears as an encompassing value: as the source of happiness and success, it allows one to hold on to one's social position. When *saubhāgya* fades, status is easily lost. This is true not only for caste and class but for status within the family. In fact, diminished *saubhāgya* can make fulfilling the roles associated with familial status difficult or even impossible. In the Nal-Damayanti accounts, loss of such status is depicted once again through recurring motifs of food and feeding.

As we have already seen, the unfortunate wife in the frame story violates the terms of Dasa Mata's feast. Having disregarded the Goddess's grace (by spilling her *prasād*), she can no longer serve her husband water, much less food. A woman who cannot prepare or serve food for her husband is greatly challenged in terms of her

ability to fulfill her role as wife. In this story, the mother takes over the role of feeding her son, a role she presumably had before he was married. When the mother resumes this role, the symbolism is clear: the marriage has been figuratively annulled. This loss is reversed again when the son, disguised as an ascetic (a celibate), accepts alms from his wife's hands. The marriage is reconfirmed by the elaborate retrieval of his wife from the palace. He brings her back in a palanquin with much "pomp and show." The procession home resembles that in which a groom brings his wife home to his village: it unsubtly suggests a renewal of matrimony and the start of a second "honeymoon."

Loss of status as wife is also very noticeable in the first telling, in which Damayanti is separated from her husband, then replaced by a new bride. She can resume being a wife only after she has fed her husband's *kuldevī* and *kuldevtā*, who are then jointly worshipped with Dasa Mata. After consuming their offerings, Damayanti is once again able to return to her life of privilege and, presumably, eat good food (not chickpeas and sesame) with her husband.

The loss of the ability to feed the husband also shows up in other episodes. The fish that Damayanti tries to cook winds up back in the river. And in the second telling, whatever she and her husband try to eat turns into one mineral or another.

Thus Damayanti loses her ability to feed her husband and he loses his ability to feed himself. Moreover, he loses the ability to support her: in the first telling Nal, refusing to rejoin Damayanti after their accidental separation, tells her, "I can't feed you." If he cannot fulfill his role as a husband, she can hardly be a wife to him.[30]

In the second telling, the inability to feed the husband is evidently due to her desire to feed herself good food. Failing to fast or feast on crude food for Dasa Mata shows that her foremost concern is not nourishing and nurturing her husband, but consuming food to satisfy herself. Her intentions are selfish, which makes her incapable of being a *pativratā*, a devoted wife who puts her husband's welfare first. Her self-absorption leads to a loss of auspiciousness that identifies her as a wholly unsatisfactory wife.

Loss of *saubhāgya* also robs the couple of parenthood; their sons are stolen by gypsies. Although both parents lose their sons, Damayanti's motherhood is most saliantly and graphically at stake. She gets them back when she shows her *saubhāgya* has returned—by feeding them. She spurts milk from her engorged breasts into her boys' mouths. In the second narrative, no children are mentioned. Thus Damayanti does not lose her maternal status, except, perhaps, by comparison with other tellings of the story in which she is explicitly shown to have and lose that status. Rather, she implicitly lacks it. In this narrative, motherhood is not presented as an aspect of her identity. This fits well with the depiction of her as selfish, as someone preoccupied with feeding herself.

The absence of the mention of any sons here is striking in a text that stresses the importance of having them. Unlike the first narrative, this text specifically holds that the Dasa Mata *vrat* ought to be performed after the birth of a first-born male, be it human, equine, or bovine. The birth of a first son confirms a wife's value to her husband and in-laws. It assures the husband of being fed by his son after he dies and becomes one of the familial ancestors to whom ritual offerings are regularly given. And, of course, it extends the lineage, while offering the family, especially parents and sisters, protection and financial prosperity. Thus, the second Damayanti is a feeder of neither husband nor sons. Whereas the first Damayanti is, like Sita, the especially auspicious mother of twin sons and whereas she is such a nurturing mother that she can spurt milk into the mouths of her sons, even after a year's separation from them, the spoiled Damayanti is presented not as a mother, but, if you will, another mouth to feed.

One more status that is symbolically abrogated is brotherhood. Unable to feed or be fed by his wife, the king begs at his sister's door. The food she feeds him is bad food—either coarse food (peasant bread and onion) or food that has mineralized.[31] Her inability to feed him good food reflects the fact that his begging at her doorstep entails a wholly inappropriate reversal of expectations. Nal should be his married sister's benefactor: he should periodically give her and her in-laws various gifts that represent his continued

interest in and commitment to her.[32] Here Nal shows up indigent, which reverses their relationship and makes it intolerable for both. He has to leave hungry and can eat at his sister's house only after he returns to his role as benefactor. When he returns with horses, elephants, and an army, she gives him good food. Thus the sister can feed her brother only in addition to, and not instead of, his wife.[33] This is possible only once Damayanti's *saubhāgya* has returned.

Thus in the Nal-Damayanti narratives, *saubhāgya* is that which makes appropriate social relations possible. Protecting *saubhāgya* through appropriate action is presented as a woman's foremost duty. To accomplish this, it may be necessary to transgress a sacred commandment: obey thy husband. Damayanti's story subtly but surely reinforces the message that women ultimately know better than their husbands when it comes to matters of survival and prosperity. This sounds like a message of resistance and an acknowledgment of female superiority, at least in this context. But it would be a mistake to read this tale as some kind of feminist manifesto. As we have seen, in the Rajput woman's account, there is no suggestion that Damayanti should *actually* have resisted Nal. Rather, it resists the typification of women as inferior by rendering Nal as a snobby dimwit. The message of the story: the woman does know better and just about everybody would be better off if the husband acknowledged it and let her do what is best. When she cannot manage to do what is best because her husband will not let her, she is still, however, blameworthy, at least theoretically. She has the power to preserve *saubhāgya* and she does not use it.

If the first telling reveals ambivalence about a woman's power and duty to preserve *saubhāgya*, the second telling reveals utter dissonance. Damayanti's persona is split so that the queen does not face the dilemma of whether to disobey her husband—no conflict between them is ever directly presented. Rather, conflict is removed and invested in the nameless couple. In this story, the woman is blamed for her own downfall because she was, in essence, too obedient and too desirous of serving her husband to heed common

sense, which required finishing her ritual devotions. If she is supposed to know better, it is hard to see how she would. She is not depicted as someone devoted to the ritual. She does it because her mother-in-law learns about it and wants to do it with her. Unlike the Damayanti in telling one, she is never shown to be capable of deciding what is best.

Both the nameless wife and Damayanti are portrayed as foolish in this account, the unnamed wife because of her thoughtless obedience and Damayanti because of her thoughtless self-absorption. The results of their foolishness are quite different: thoughtless obedience earns for the nameless wife solitary banishment, whereas selfishness earns Damayanti exile in the company of her husband. Thus, the patently obedient wife loses her husband. Presumably this is because she had the opportunity to be disobedient. Meanwhile the spoiled Damayanti, who is never put into the position of choosing whether to disobey her husband, never faces her counterpart's double bind. Her failure to perform Dasa Mata's ritual brings on the usual trouble, but she is never anything but utterly blameworthy. She faced no theoretical dilemma and she could hardly blame her kind, wise husband for her terrible mistake. The double message that this telling makes particularly clear: if there's a double bind, well, that's beside the point—when it comes to misfortune, cherchez la femme!

Notes

1. The Sanskrit is Nala, and is used here when referring to the Sanskrit hero; when using Hindi sources I retain the Hindi Nal. This paper takes as its point of departure an article I co-wrote with Ann Grodzins Gold (1998). For reading earlier drafts of this paper, I thank Ann Gold, Susan Snow Wadley, and Dennis Hudson; for first introducing me to the story of Nala and Damayanti in first year Sanskrit ages ago and for initiating me into the world of Sanskrit epic, I express deep gratitude to Daniel Ingalls and Gary Tubb.
2. This is a translation of Biardeau (1985: 6–7) appearing in Smith 1992: 27.

3. Smith 1992, 27. David Shulman offers a moderating opinion on who has center stage. He says: "the story is by no means only about him but at least equally about his famous wife and savior." This essay contains intriguing reflections on human agency and fate as portrayed in the Sanskrit story. Possessed by Kali (Time, Fate), Nala is and is not himself: agency is terribly and poignantly muddled in this Sanskrit tale. Nala blames Kali for his misfortune and speaking "in shifty tones." He says he is not responsible for his abandonment of his Damayanti when he creeps away while she sleeps in the forest, but claims credit for his perseverance despite his possession by Kali (1994: 7–10).
4. Jamison's translation, 1996: 15.
5. The name is a pseudonym, which I use because I promised anonymity to the women I interviewed during fieldwork.
6. Ann Gold translates her name, "Mother Ten." The celebration of this goddess of fate requires the narration of ten stories. For background on Dasa Mata stories, see Gold 1995 b: 269–280 and 1981. I use the Mewari term *dasā* for the Hindi *dashā*, literally "condition."
7. As will soon be seen, jewelry, horses, and elephants, as well as the pipal tree and chickpeas are all items figuring prominently in the Nal-Damayanti story.
8. For treatment of a similar "necklace" tradition in south India, see Reynolds 1980: 35–60.
9. I recorded the recitation of all ten stories by women in a Rajput-dominated village, but the recording, which I made in a one-room house into which were crowded about twenty women and myriad children, was so poor that I could do little with it. During the recitation, the women constantly chatted among themselves, while babies cried and children crowded around me to make humorous noises for the recording.
10. *Caupaṛ* is a board game that looks a bit like Parcheesi. "Playing *caupaṛ*" is sometime a euphemism for having sexual relations (Gold 1995b: 444 and 1992: 99). Couples playing *caupaṛ* is a common theme in Rajasthani miniature paintings.
11. The general sense of this statement: "the good times begin today for me as well."
12. This is an obvious reference to the *Mahābhārata*, the epic in which the most famous telling of this story is found. For linkages to the *Mahābhārata*, see Gold and Harlan 1998.
13. "Nine lakhs" is a formulaic expression meaning "extremely valuable."

14. In Ann Gold's version, the sister-in-law feeds them yogurt, but it turns to pus and blood, personal communication, October, 1995.
15. The word used here is *taḳdīr.*
16. The word *kuldevtā* is not commonly used. The Rajputs I came to know generally referred to gods who are associated with lineages (as well gods chosen by families or individuals) as *iṣṭadevtās.*
17. Although this narrative says the sister had given the couple bad food, which then turned into valuable gems, the other telling, as we shall see, holds that the sister originally gave gems but that the gems were destroyed by the couple's bad fortune.
18. On the theme of blaming the victim in the *Mahābhārata* Nala story, see Smith 1992: 32. There Smith cites a previous discussion in Ingalls 1962: 281–98.
19. For an extensive discussion of Rajput *kuldevī*s, see Harlan 1992: 52–111. When I surveyed women about family deities, all but a few, very westernized urban women knew the names of their husband's *kuldevī.* Worshipping the in-law's *kuldevī* is generally the first religious duty a woman performs when she enters her husband's household. Many of the men I met, however, did not know the names of their *kuldevī*s. The gender variance here reflects an increasing tendency for households to leave women in charge of routine household devotions and household shrine maintenance. On the primary identification of domestic rituals as women's business, see Harlan 2000. Nal's failure to know his *kuldevī* is a more egregious shortcoming than contemporary men's: Nal was a king. Royal consecration in Rajput lineages requires homage to the lineage's *kuldevī.* A king who does not know the name of the *kuldevī* who would accompany him to battle is really quite unthinkable.
20. For detailed treatment of double binds in heroine traditions, see Harlan 1992: 156–72, 182. The basic point is as follows: Rajput heroines are bound by the code of purdah. Their fidelity to their husbands is visibly represented by enclosure within the space relegated to women in the Rajput household. Violating purdah means transgressing the law of wifely obedience, yet such a transgression is essential in stories where a wife rescues a husband from death in battle or leads his army after he dies. The resolution of the difficulty is provided by sati immolation. Dying on the pyre, the virtue of the woman is manifest despite her infraction of the obedience norm.

21. These are the foods typically served at weddings. Ironically, consuming foods symbolic of auspiciousness, she renounces auspiciousness. On the theme of selfishness and feeding oneself, see Gold, 1995a: 130–32.
22. Madhu Kishwar (1996) has observed that in interviewing women about their opinion of the heroine Sita, many women (and some men as well) characterized Ram as a bad or undesirable husband because he abandoned her.
23. The splitting of Nala's persona in the Sanskrit story occurs through Nala's possession by Kali. For comments on the split, see Shulman 1994.
24. This is typical of printed *vrat kathā* pamphlets, many of which are compiled by Brahmins and the purpose of which is to explain exactly how and why ritual ought to be performed.
25. Several Rajput women mentioned this to me when I asked them what would happen if the thread were to become soiled while worn or accidentally torn or dropped.
26. Particularly troublesome is their tendency to drink alcohol and eat meat, which are thought to promote martial and sexual vigor.
27. As John D. Smith notes, "taste for good," which Smith (like van Buitenen 3.73.10, 20, 22) interprets as culinary skill, is one of Nala's special talents in the Sanskrit epic (1994: 21, esp. n. 18).
28. I actually like chickpeas, but could never get the cook (actually a shepherd with little culinary experience) in the household in which I was living in Rajasthan to cook them for me: he always claimed there were none available in the market though I saw them offered for sale daily. When I finally pressed him on the matter, he said it wouldn't be appropriate for either of us to eat such coarse food in the Rajput home in which we were living.
29. Although proud Brahmins are often the target of such *bhakti* stories, here the Brahmanical narrator's target is Kshatriyas. The explicit and vivid depiction of king and queen in jail eating the very food they refused to eat is perhaps a reflection of the particular tension between Brahmins and Kshatriyas who have often clashed in their interpretations about whether preeminent status is ideally separated from power (and thus attributed to Brahmins) or derived from power (and thus attributed to Kshatriyas). This lesson in humility could be related to this traditional Brahmin-Kshatriya tension.
30. For associations between food and sexuality in women's stories, see Gold 1995a: 121; 1994: 53–56, and Wadley 2004. Lynn Bennett

discusses the "romantic overtones associated with gifts of special food" by husbands to wives in connection with the rituals of Ṛṣī Pancmi (1983: 223). On food and auspiciousness, see Marglin: 1985, 85–88.

31. There is also the "pus and blood" telling noted above.
32. For a succinct and engaging discussion of brothers and gift-giving, see Raheja 1995, 33–37.
33. The idea of the sister replacing the wife as feeder could represent regression of the husband, such as that which occurs in the frame story, where the mother resumes feeding her now celibate son once the wife is banished.

Damayanti's String: Epic Threads in Women's Ritual Stories[1]

Ann Grodzins Gold

What's in a name? Vernacular stories, epic motifs

In Ghatiyali village, Ajmer District, Rajasthan, March 1980, I first heard, recorded, and roughly translated an oral performance of a women's worship story (*vrat kathā*) about a king and queen. The Rajput woman, Shobhag Kanvar, who narrated this story in a local Rajasthani vernacular, referred to it as "Nal and Damayanti's Story" (hereafter Ajmer 80). I gave no thought at the time to a *Mahābhārata* link. It was easy to assume that this women's ritual tale had randomly attracted the appropriately royal names of Nala and Damayanti, available in the cultural pool.[2] However, while many kings and queens appear in the approximately forty stories I recorded from this female ritual expert alone in 1979–81—not to mention scores of tales narrated by other women—none of these royal figures have names.

Although this would seem to be a suggestive discrepancy, it did not strike me immediately, for the paired names were not at all prominent in Shobhag Kanvar's performance. She began in the usual way: "There was a king, a king and queen, and the queen always worshipped Dasa Mata [a form of Lakshmi]." The protagonists' names were casually inserted, afterthoughts we might legitimately assume, about midway through the long tale—first Nal's and several scenes later Damayanti's. More noticeable was Shobhag Kanvar's consistently speaking of this story in our conversations as "Nal and Damayanti's story," as did others including the Brahmin man who

transcribed it for me. Moreover, I noted other names appearing even earlier in the narrative. The king and queen's daughter Malagari; their horse, Tajshahi and their twin sons Sayar and Nir are all named—even as they vanish from their parents' and masters' sight. This profusion of proper names presents a strong contrast with the usual mode of women's ritual narratives where all characters are introduced as social types: "a Brahmin's daughter," "a merchant's son," or a "husband's younger brother's wife."[3] In 1993 I recorded another version of the same ritual story in Ghatiyali (hereafter Ajmer 93). This was told by Ugam Purohit, a literate Brahmin woman, who began forthwith: "Once there was a King Nal and a Queen Damayanti, and they were moneyed people..."

In the discussion to follow of this female-authored, regional, vernacular variant on King Nal's tribulations, I draw on both Ajmer versions as well as on the tale summarized and discussed by Lindsey Harlan in the preceding chapter, and recorded in Udaipur District in 1985 (hereafter Udaipur 85). For me, Udaipur 85 considerably enhanced the plausibility of more than coincidental linkages between these women's worship stories and the Sanskrit epic. Structurally, it is quite similar to the Ajmer versions, but the narrative includes the crucial plot motif of gambling, absent in Ajmer district tellings. All three Rajasthani oral narratives portray a royal couple who, because of the king's offense to the goddess of well being whom his wife worships, lose everything and endure great hardships.[4]

Ajmer 80 and Udaipur 85 have in common with the *Mahābhārata* version the couple's separation as they struggle to survive their joint misfortunes, and a reunion when divine favor is restored. However, the most recent of the three oral texts, Ajmer 93, keeps the two together throughout their ordeal. In all three oral Rajasthani tellings, it is the wife's redeeming ritual action that restores the pair to their earlier happiness, which the husband's inappropriate behavior had precipitously destroyed. This gendered pivoting, a male action determines their sufferings and a female action their return to good times, is critical to the interpretation I offer here.[5]

In my view, the most striking home truth and moral message in the Rajasthani Nal story is its definitive demonstration that husbands

who deny or suspect their wives' religious knowledge and practices are fools who will eventually learn the hard way to know and to act better—not to make the same mistake twice.[6] But other Indian women's tales certainly articulate the need for men to respect, and not suspect, women's devotional activities.[7] What then makes Nal and Damayanti's story different from those of nameless kings and queens who people women's expressive traditions?

Following some insights in David Shulman's essay on the "riddle of Nala," an interpretation based centrally if not exclusively on the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (Shulman 1994), I shall suggest some distinctive threads in the oral vernacular Nal narratives, linking them conceptually with the Sanskrit epic. To begin, I place the Rajasthani Nal story in its ritual context, which is simultaneously a narrative context. Turning to interpretation, I first explore the intertwined concepts of fault and fate in the Rajasthani women's ritual story. Finally, I am concerned with Nal and Damayanti as a couple, with the universe of kinfolk in which they work through their troubles, and with their joint dependence on the goddess whom she, not he, worships faithfully. These are matters involving identity and agency. I focus, therefore, on those episodes that offer insights into the images and consequences of fault, fate, and marital unity in the vernacular multiforms, particularly Nal's initial mistake and his return to grace one year later. I highlight in this discussion both some interesting variations marking the three separate vernacular tellings, and some ways all of these contrast, but also resonate, with the Sanskrit. Hans van Buitenen suggested to my first year Sanskrit class in 1978 that Nala seemed to him to be a piece of the *Mahābhārata* which, if not authored by a woman, nonetheless presented a female perspective.[8] Possibly, by thinking about ways women's tellings comment on responsibility, destiny, and identity, we may even venture to imagine sources for, as well as reflections of, the classical epic's concerns.[9]

Ritual and Narrative Contexts

In many Rajasthani villages and cities women annually worship the beneficent goddess Dasa Mata (alternatively Dasha Mata). The days

of Dasa Mata's worship fall during a period crowded with rituals and festivals, and rich with songs and stories. Coming at the beginning of the hot season, this period coincides with the harvest of winter grain crops, a time of bounty and celebration. From the full moon of Holi closing the lunar month called *Phālgun* (March-April), and continuing as the moon wanes and begins to wax once more during the succeeding month of *Chaitra* (April-May), Rajasthani women participate in a series of ritual events appealing to and celebrating various aspects of female divinity.[10] These rituals are all intended to secure for participants and their families the various comforts of a good life and, by the same token, to ward off the disasters of childlessness, widowhood, illness, loneliness, and poverty.

The most literal translation of "Dasa Mata" would be singularly un-euphonic and un-evocative in English: "Condition Mother." The stories teach listeners that this goddess's power may totally transform a person's condition (*dāsa; dashā*) at lightning speed. Dasa Mata's worship goes on for ten days, and in my own earlier publications I have called her "Mother Ten" (1995:434). Lindsey Harlan translates her name as "Mother Fate." Neither of these is perfectly accurate, and in this volume we both avoid translation dilemmas and speak of her as Dasa Mata. Dasa Mata is identified with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and prosperity; her opposite, Odasā (alternatively Odashā or Adashā), is Kulakshmi, the personification and bringer of ill fortune.

Each day of Dasa Mata worship involves a fast, a simple domestic ritual with grain offerings placed on a ten-sided figure that is painted on the courtyard floor, and storytelling.[11] In 1980, before each worship Shobhag Kanvar prepared a special ritual space: With cow dung paste as her medium, she used her hands to paint a brown ten-pointed figure upon which she placed a skein of white cotton yarn and a small pile of whole wheat grains.[12] Next to this design Shobhag Kanvar set a small brass jar of pure water and a small dish of red powder, mixing water with powder to make a thick, bright red paste. On each day of Dasa Mata's worship she used this paste to make auspicious dots on the ten-pointed design—one on the

first day, two on the second, until a full complement of ten dots is made on the tenth day. Each day, as the worship began, every woman present took a few grains in her hand and held them while a story was told. At each story's conclusion, following Shobhag Kanvar's lead, the women tossed the grains in front of them while uttering prayers to the goddess.

On the last day women dressed in their best, and attendance at least tripled. On the tenth day the skein of yarn is twisted into necklaces called Dasa Mata's strings which all participating women wear throughout the year that follows. Each string has ten knots in it. These strings are understood as forms, or embodiments of the goddess. The string *is* Dasa Mata, just as a stone icon is a god, infused with divine power by its worshippers' attention. Dasa Mata's strings should be removed only if there is a birth or death in the wearer's immediate family, signaling a period of ritual pollution incompatible with the deity's presence. At the end of a year, a new string is made ready and the old is untied—it should never be broken—and carefully disposed of in a cool auspicious place such as a holy river, a village well, or the earth where a sacred basil plant is growing. King Nal's irrevocable big mistake is to destroy the string.[13]

In an interview immediately following the tenth day ritual and stories in 1993, Ugam Purohit clarified the direct connection between the story she had just told and enjoined behavior toward the string, even when it is outdated and ready to be discarded, as women's old strings were on that day. The tenth day of Dasa Mata worship is also the day of pipal tree worship, and the pipal tree is another form of Lakshmi. My conversation with Ugam went as follows:

Ugam: Today we put our old Dasa strings in the well... and we put on these others.

Ann: Oh. Is it Pipal Mother? Is that why you put it in the well?

Ugam: The well is cool, and that is where we should put it; we should not break it or burn it. This is the meaning in the king's story I told: you should not break it and you should not burn it in the cooking hearth; you ought to cool it.

Ann: I see, you cool it, and you should not burn it?

Ugam: Yes, you ought to cool it. The king burned it, but it ought to be cooled. Now this is the meaning... to accept that this string is very good, equal to jewelry worn on the neck. He broke it and burned it. He thought, "you ought to wear jewelry," and a lot [of bad things] happened. He was the king of Ujjain City,[14] and what kind of condition did he get? Total poverty, and homelessness. If he had not [broken the string], then what was his situation? A king!

Ann: Yes, he was a king.

Ugam: Yes, and his condition went bad; it went bad, and then everyone said, "King Nal fell into poverty."

Dasa Mata stories teach that the goddess gives well-being, comfort and plenty to the families of women who please her by correctly performing her rituals and respecting her embodiment in their string necklaces. All these elements of behavior are coded in the stories as *niyam*, good habits. Those favored by Dasa Mata are said to have her *niyam*, that is, to follow her rules. By contrast, if the goddess is angered or abused, if her rules or her string are broken, abject poverty and every kind of bad luck will result: Dasa departs and Odasā arrives. Instantaneously, Dasa Mata is capable of bestowing or removing well-being and ill-being: royal ramparts crumble overnight, grain bins empty, gardens wither; alternatively nine-story palaces magically appear.

This narrative pattern, as well as the ritual context in which the stories are told, clearly place Dasa Mata tales within the genre, widespread in north India, of *vrat kathā*—or vow stories. *Vrat*, like Dasa's worship, typically involve a fast, a simple domestic ritual, and a story. Both women and men, but more frequently women, may undertake *vrat* for the well-being of themselves and their families.[15] While all *vrat* are individually undertaken as personal vows, some have collective performative aspects to them, as does Dasa Mata's. Small groups of women, who may be neighbors and friends as well as relatives, gather at a storyteller's home to perform Dasa Mata's worship together.

While the first nine days may be observed by many women separately and silently at home, all who seek the goddess's protection

for the coming year will attend the tenth and last day of Dasa Mata worship in order to obtain the blessed ten-knotted string to wear around their necks. The stories of the first nine days have no particular order, but the story of King Nal and Queen Damayanti, with which we are concerned here, must be told on this last and most important day, and it is more than twice as long as all the rest. It is the only story that makes specific reference to the string. At Ugam Purohit's house in 1993, a temporary icon of Pipal Mother was constructed with fresh, green leaves on the courtyard floor atop Dasa Mata's usual ten-pointed cow dung worship space.[16]

In 1980 I recorded all but one of the ten days of ritual storytelling at Shobhag Kanvar's home, where I lived from September 1979 to March 1981. Shobhag Kanvar's Rajput community were historically the ruling, landed gentry—dispossessed of much property and power after Independence and land reform. Her own husband and one of her two sons had urban jobs as chauffeur and truck driver, respectively; another, more educated, son held a clerical position in a nearby town. Shobhag Kanvar, who had no formal schooling and can neither read nor write, is an acknowledged religious expert in Ghatiyali. She was always quick to summon me and my tape recorder when what she considered a worthwhile cultural performance was about to take place in her home. Although other women performed Mother Ten's worship in 1980, I attended and recorded only Shobhag Kanvar's rituals.[17]

In 1993, while staying with Bhoju Ram Gujar, I was only present for the tenth day of Ugam Purohit's worship. Her courtyard was crowded with neighborhood women—Brahmin, Gujar, and others. Besides some subtle variations in the story, discussed below, Ugam's performance style was extremely different from Shobhag Kanvar's. Ugam sped through her story at breakneck speed, while Shobhag Kanvar elaborated unhurriedly, and attempted to keep control of her listeners' attention. Shobhag Kanvar was clearly performing for a human audience, and after each ritual my tapes record her asking those present, "Was it a good story?"

Ugam did not seem to care about her human audience at all. When I asked her about this, her speedy style, she was clear that she told the stories "for the string" and for the goddess, not for the

women listeners. Most surprising to me was her statement that she told the same story [the Nal-Damayanti story] each day of the ritual. Although Ugam's telling was accordingly far less performatively engaging, her narrative matched Shobhag Kanvar's for length and complexity. It was not truncated in any way, and included the detailed double telling of each event as things first go bad for Nal and Damayanti, and then are righted.

To participate in Dasa Mata's worship and receive its benefits, women forego their morning meal and make sure to bathe, but otherwise they carry out their usual routines. Some time in the late morning or early afternoon, fasting women may gather at the storyteller's home. In 1980, the regular participants who assembled in Shobhag Kanvar's courtyard for Dasa Mata's worship were the female residents of this compound household. These included Shobhag Kanvar, her daughter-in-law, her older sister (married to her husband's older brother), her sister's daughter-in-law, and me. A few neighbor women, none of them Rajputs, attended irregularly. A couple of workmen were employed at the time doing masonry labor on Shobhag Kanvar's new house, and were thus professionally immune to the customs of gender seclusion that generally applied in a Rajput courtyard. I was surprised and amused to note how these men maneuvered each day within hearing distance of the storytelling session, positioning themselves just a little behind the small circle of women. Officially nonexistent at this female event, they nonetheless interjected appreciative exclamations and offered commentary on the stories. Shobhag Kanvar responded to their interest with her customary self-possession.

Shobhag Kanvar usually told three stories at each worship session. The first (and longest) was always of the goddess herself; the second was always of the elephant-headed god Ganeshji (or Ganesh), son of Shiva and Parvati. The third was of a character called the Greedy One (Lobhyā). On the tenth day in 1980, the Dasa Mata story, of Raja Nal and Rani Damayanti, was not followed by a story of Ganesh, but rather one about Parvati, in which Ganesh and Shiva also figure; the closing prayers were addressed to Shiva

as Mahadevji, father of Ganesh. On this tenth and final day, there was no Greedy One story.

Except for the tenth day requiring the story of Nal, there is no articulated or discernable pattern in story choice. Different performers choose different tales. Ugam Purohit followed her Nal-Damayanti story with a familiar story of Path Mother—one I had heard at many women's rituals in the village during the years I lived there.[18] Then she told two more: one of Ganesh and one of the Greedy One.

Shobhag Kanvar's repertoire was clearly much larger. She took an interest in increasing it, and told me that she had learned some of these stories from an aunt in her natal home, some from her (now deceased) mother-in-law in our village, and some from an elderly woman of a different community. During the ten days of her Dasa Mata worship, Shobhag Kanvar produced twenty-nine stories, of which I was able to record twenty-six.[19] Only two of the Greedy One's tales had substantial narrative content, however.

Certainly the corpus of worship tales told by Shobhag Kanvar during the goddess's ten days are intertextually linked and cross cut by a few recurrent and potent themes. They also share a limited set of plots. Virtually all of the Ganesh stories highlight the importance of selfless service to deities, and deities' responsiveness to this service. Usually it is offerings made by the poor, abandoned, and lonely—paradigmatically orphans and widows—that receive the highest value, reaping rewards of divine vision (*darśan*), grace, wealth, and security. Thus the needy are protected, and granted not only prosperity but supportive, surrogate kin. The chief feature of the Greedy One's stories was his futile efforts to snatch for himself the merit of women's fasts and offerings and stories. Shobhag Kanvar would conclude the Greedy One's tales by admonishing him that his story and his grains belonged to him, but nothing more.

Stories about Dasa Mata exhibit a more complex array of themes. Surveying the nine stories Shobhag Kanvar told in 1980, I could loosely categorize them as follows: Four might be grouped together as tales of virtuous girls on whom "inappropriate husbands" are

inflicted. Of these, two are different stories about snake husbands, one treats a girl married into a house with five bachelors, and one a girl deceived into marriage with a sword. In each case, the goddess rewards these women who follow her rules (or whose mothers once followed her rules) with a miraculously transformed, handsome human husband, and usually a son to boot. Two more stories are about rivalry between brothers' wives; in each case, the poor but devoted sister-in-law is rewarded while the rich and arrogant woman is punished. In one story Dasa Mata seems to merge with Parvati and is playing a board game with Shiva in an ascetic guise. In this story, one with variants familiar throughout Hindu mythology, a poor Brahmin who observes their game is asked to predict who will win and who will lose. When he picks the goddess, she rewards him, but fate keeps snatching his reward. His wife finally makes him realize that he must predict Shiva's victory, not the goddess's.[20] Another Dasa Mata story is almost identical with one of the Ganeshji stories, and concerns a disempowered but feisty old lady whose devotion, in this case to Dasa Mata, is ultimately rewarded by the king adopting her as "mother," though only after he tries and fails to rob her of the fruits of her worship.

The story of King Nal, as the climax of this series, certainly has in common with all the others a stress on the importance of serving a deity sincerely, following ritual rules, and thereby receiving good fruits. In some ways, although he is human, Nal could be likened to the inadequate sword or snake husbands, or seen as uncouth and ill-behaved like the five bachelors. There are ways, however, in which this story stands out from the others for more than its protagonists' having names. Ajmer 80 is by far the longest women's story I ever recorded. Ajmer 93 is almost its equal, and Udaipur 85 is similarly protracted. All begin with Nal's disastrous act, followed by a series of episodes in which he and his wife lose or alienate possessions, relatives, friends and strangers. Following the central worship that restores their well-being, one by one each and every unlucky event already recounted is reversed. In all but Ajmer 93 the king gains a second wife, the single external factor marking the couple's situation as transformed after the prolonged disaster is brought to almost circular closure.

Fault and Fate

"Nothing human beings do in this world is devoid of *daiva*" [cited in Shulman 1994:25].

... "not I" rings truer than "I, driven by an unknown impulse that is yet wholly mine" [Shulman 1994:27].

Many have pondered Hindu notions of fault and fate.[21] Rather than opposed, the two are deeply and perplexingly connected. While fate—*kismat* if not *daiva*—often offers a catch-all causality in rural Hindu explanations, it is one that does not lead by any means to fatalism (Gold 1992:328–33). If vernacular versions of Nal's tale lack the poetic ambiguities and psychological depth of the Sanskrit epic, we nonetheless find commonalities among the ways both oral tellings and epic texts ponder the king's blame. But while the epic Nal has a domino chain of faults, flaws, or afflicted fates to think back upon, the folk Nal's error is crystallized in a single turning point. All is well; then he does something wrong and it transforms his condition and his destiny. Nal uses fate as an explanation, or excuse, for his trials in one of the three Rajasthani tellings. His wife Damayanti, as we shall see, doesn't buy it; nor does she let him off so easily in the Sanskrit text (Shulman 1994:9).

The Rajasthani stories' internal logic attributes Nal's bad luck squarely to his initial bad deed. That deed is simultaneously an offense to his wife, to the female species, and to the goddess. Listen to the storytellers' depictions of the King's mistake. As Ajmer 80 tells it:

Once there were a king and queen. One day the queen worshipped Dasa Mata. The queen had golden jewelry, golden necklaces, silver necklaces. But after she worshipped Dasa Mata she put on Dasa Mata's white string.

In the evening the king came into the castle, and after they ate, the king and queen began to play Parcheesi [a common euphemism in women's tales for love-making]. While they were playing, the king's gaze fell on the queen's neck. "O ho!" he said, and not listening he broke it and burned it. Burned what? Dasa Mata's string.

"Uh Oh! You've done a frightening thing! That was my Dasa Mata and it is women's business to wear it. What have you done? You've burned up Dasa Mata, and now what will happen?"

"Are there such virtues [*guṇ*] in that Dasa, in that white string?"

"Yes there are great virtues in it. You'll find out tomorrow, no even tonight in your dreams. You've done a lot that's very bad. This was my special woman's magic.

As Udaipur 85 tells it, Queen Damayanti, having learned from other women about the benefits of Dasa Mata worship, performs the ritual and dons the string.

That night when the king came in and visited his wife in her chambers, he saw the thread on her neck and said "Ugh! That thing on your neck is ugly. You have a golden one worth a lakh: wear that! Damayanti protested, but Nal refused to allow her to wear it, saying "It's the worst!" He tore it off her neck, threw it on the ground, then picked it up and tossed it in the fire (Harlan, this volume).

Ajmer 93 has an identical opening scene.

After this single rash, arrogant, and sexist act of King Nal's everything goes wrong. In all three versions, multiple dreams, signs and omens determine the royal couple's fall into misfortune. In the Udaipur text, as already noted, Nal loses the kingdom gambling. In both Ajmer tellings, wealth just magically disappears: full grain bins become empty in a twinkling. Moreover, the royal couple's very natures are profoundly altered, initially in their dreams as the queen in Ajmer 80 predicts. But these dreams come true the following day:

When the king went out to relieve himself he asked for a broken clay pot to carry water [normally he would use a brass jar]. And the queen said to her servant, "Bring me some residue of sesame seeds from the oil man [a very low-class food]; I have a great craving for it" (Ajmer 80).

Strikingly, the couple's misfortune is so thoroughly internalized that even their desires are impoverished ones.

In all three folk tellings, the king and queen leave their kingdom out of embarrassment at their "bad condition," losing on the road their children, their horse, their last servant, and their good reputation. They visit various friends and relatives from whom they

hope to get some help, but always with bad results that only increase their double burden of helplessness and shame.

In the Sanskrit version of Nala—as presented by Shulman—Nala says near the end to "the tearful and still accusing Damayanti": "It was not my fault that my kingdom was lost; Kali perpetrated that, and also caused me to abandon you" (Shulman 1994:7). Forced in several situations to explain the change in his condition, the Rajasthani folk Nal similarly declares, in the Udaipur version, that the goddess Dasa Mata's anger is the cause of his ordeals as a pauper in exile, ordeals shared by Damayanti. Thus both the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*'s King Nala and the women's worship tale's King Nal attribute their sufferings to divine causality.

In Ajmer 93, the vernacular Nal, like the epic Nala, attempts to deflect all fault onto bland fate: "Brother, it is nobody's fault at all, it is my *kismat*'s fault." His queen, however, takes a definitively opposing view of their joint suffering's cause. She informs her husband's sister several scenes later, "Your brother forbid me [to wear] and burned my Dasa Mata [string emblem] and that is why this [bad] situation has come about...."

Thus she directly blames Nal for his apparently willful error, although not to his face. By that act of tearing the sacred string, it would seem that the king wished to assert his own singular, independent, male selfhood as ruler and husband, an absolute power wielder. But through it he fatally failed to acknowledge Damayanti's human, religious, female worth, not to mention the goddess's divinely superior, female power. The king's pretensions crumble instantly with his wrongful act, as do the symbolic turrets of his castle. The women's story's main message hangs on acknowledging Nal's genuine fault, and responsibility, at that obtusely selfish instant.

Like the vernacular Nal, the *Mahābhārata* Nala, too, committed a ritual offense. But the chain of blame has greater narrative depth in the Sanskrit epic than in the Rajasthani tellings. The gods were already angry with the epic Nala: that is why he slipped up in his ritual niceties in the first place. It is easier for him to insist, "It is not my fault." In Udaipur 85, the Rajasthani Nal finally and clearly

acknowledges his own error as the cause of the goddess's anger. When the queen informs him that Dasa Mata will return their good fortune if they continue to worship her, Nal says "This time I will make no mistake. Wear your thread: I give you my permission."

Couples/Families/Selves

Almost nothing that the text mentions manages to remain intact, unsplit, or singular, although thematically there is also a countervailing drive toward unity—this is, after all, in the most general sense, a love story about two people uniting as one [Shulman 1994:13].

... [Nala's] identity depends, in moments of doubt, upon the outside voice of Damayanti [Shulman 1994:17].

The doubt articulated by the story goes beyond the mystery of the lovers' union; the text articulates not only the obvious and difficult question of whether two can ever be one... but also the even more troubling and rooted problem of whether *one* can ever be one [Shulman 1994:18].

We might speculate that it is because Damayanti is so thoroughly a part of him that Nal cannot grant her one difference—the alien white string, her "special women's strength." Nal and Damayanti indeed seem very close to the ideal half-body model of marriage, united in fate and also, it seems, fault. The repercussions affecting both Nal and his queen and resulting directly from Nal's violation of Damayanti's Dasa Mata string reveal much about the king and queen as a couple, a pair. In the Udaipur version, Damayanti asks the goddess to forgive her mistake, although she never made one. In other words, she assumes Nal's error, making it hers as well.

Nal and Damayanti separate in both the Ajmer 80 and Udaipur texts, as do the epic couple. However, the vernacular Nal never deliberately and cruelly abandons his queen. In Ajmer 80, the two simply agree to part; in Udaipur 85, storm winds blow them down different roads. Nor does the Rajasthani Nal rob his wife, except of course of the string. But the string may well stand for everything she has, as much as does Damayanti's dress, of which the Sanskrit Nala takes half when he leaves her in the woods. She reproves him later, publicly, for this depredation.

In all three Rajasthani variants, the pair's joint fortune is restored through Damayanti's good actions. Her redeeming ritual, his second marriage, their reunion and return to good fortune or a good condition form a tightly meshed set of events. Accounts of these events in each of the regional variants offer further insights into the intertwined fates of the royal couple.

In the Udaipur 85 telling of this critical turning point, Damayanti has a job as attendant to a prostitute; King Nal finds out there will be a bridegroom choice (*svayamvara*) for a princess on the very day of Dasa Mata Worship, one year after their initial downfall. He tells this to Damayanti, for they have located one another, not such a difficult process in the vernacular as it is in the Sanskrit version.

When that day arrived, Damayanti did Dasa Mata's *vrat* and *pūjā*. She prayed to Dasa Mata for forgiveness, saying "Dasa Mata, I made a mistake. Please return my good fortune."... The queen went to Nal and told him he must also worship Dasa Mata.

It is here that Nal promises to make no further mistakes, and sustains a facade of male authority by granting permission for his wife's worship. As Harlan points out, in this telling Damayanti and the storyteller both pay at least lip service to the wife's proper subordination. But the story makes it equally clear he had no choice. The outcome is as desired: Nal is chosen (by an elephant carrying a garland) as another princess's groom and marries her despite the onlookers' initial horrified protests. Eventually they accept him as "surely written into the princess' fate" (Harlan, this volume).

In Ajmer 80, by contrast with Udaipur 85, Damayanti operates quite independently of Nal, without any mutual consultation. Moreover, it is not only her ritual actions but also multiple female attributes including her artistry at flower-weaving and her natal family connections that move them toward a return of good fortune.

She stayed in the city, and made very fine flower-bracelets and hair-flowers, and sold them in the bazaar. She sent some to the queen of that city, and the queen said to her servant girl, "Oh, in all my life I've never seen such lovely hair-flowers and flower-bracelets. Who made them?"

"One who lives near me makes them."

"Today is Dasa Mata's day, so bring her here. Let her string for me such fine flower-bracelets and hair-flowers."

Damayanti participates in Dasa Mata's worship, and is thereby restored to the goddess' good grace. Dasa Mata shows her favor by having Damayanti's feet leave auspicious red prints, and through this miracle the queen sponsoring the ritual recognizes Damayanti as her missing sister; there follow a tearful reunion, baths, new clothes.

Meanwhile at a bridegroom choice in another place, Nal is selected:

They set up chairs and spread carpets and sprayed perfume and various things were happening, and the princess hung the groom-garland [on him]. They pushed him away, but the princess hung it on him. There were seated there great kings, the king of Bundi, the king of Jodhpur, the kings of Bikaner and of Sanganer all were seated there, but she didn't put it on them. She put it on this one [Nal].

"Who is this beggar, this gypsy?" But she put it on him and if something happens three times it's final. She put the groom garland on him and he married the princess. All the people said, "It is her written fate."

That Nal's good fortune (and this princess's fate) are both the result of Damayanti's worship and Dasa Mata's agency is so obvious as to remain unspoken.

This second queen, whose fate is to marry Nal, plays little part in the story, and has no lines; Damayanti hardly notices her.[22] Although other women's folklore often violently opposes polygyny (Raheja and Gold 1994), this extra queen's only apparent impact is on the kingdom's subjects.[23] They note her presence as the capstone to Nal's restored royal fortune, a sign that counters the earlier inauspicious ones. Thus Ajmer 80 ends with Raja Nal's subjects' commentary on his experience:

"Today our king's condition has changed back. He endured a lot of misery, but look at him today." All the people came running, and they said, "Hey Master, previously you had one queen and today there are two queens."

Turning to the Ajmer 93 telling, we find a queen who is strikingly assertive; she tells the king just what to do to restore their fortune

and he humbly acquiesces; there is no pretense of his acting authoritatively or independently of his spouse; nor is he allowed the male privilege of a second marriage.

> [Damayanti] said, "King sir, one whole year has passed and we have experienced sorrow. Now the day of Holi has come and on the next day, tomorrow, I will do this. You bring me some cotton thread, and for ten days I will tell the stories and on the tenth day I will put on Dasa's charmed string. Previously you forbid me, but don't forbid me now in that way. Previously you forbid me and that is why our condition changed."
>
> [Humbly indeed Nal replies]: "No matter, Lady Queen, I won't forbid you."

This newest version, told by an educated woman, seems to diminish Nal's will and enhance his fault well beyond the rest. Moreover, it refuses him the pleasure of a second wife.[24]

The Rajasthani vernacular Nal and Damayanti evidently have selfhoods at least partially merged, like the Sanskrit epic pair. But they are also shown as dependent on surrounding relatives and friends for their identities. That is, the story elaborates poignantly the ways that their identities, like those of most persons in human society, reside at least in part in the ways others treat them. In this stress on society, I find the vernacular diverges from the epic in its understanding of what it means to be human (Wadley, 1999).

For example, Nal's existence as a king is defined by his reception at the homes of a fellow king and, even more importantly, his wet-nurse sister and his birth sister.[25] When his bad condition blights these encounters, he ceases to be King Nal. While the epic Nala disguises his identity, the folk Nal simply becomes unrecognizable, not himself, as bad fortune grips him ever more firmly.

For Damayanti in Ajmer 80, it is the safe and feminine space of a sister's palace—away from Nal and his wrong-headedness—that allows her to initiate their joint return to fortune. Moreover, the climactic restoration of her being is the recovery of her sons: not the reaffirmation of her husband's kingship, but of her own motherhood. This moment in the women's tale has heightened emotional power for teller and audience. The boys have been under the care of peddlers.

When the king and queen try to reclaim them, their rights are denied, and a test of mother-love is proposed, as told in Ajmer 80.

The peddler woman began to argue, "These are my servants."

"No, these are my princes." They were quarreling and the queen's tears were falling, and the king and queen were dying of sorrow. [Nal shares her parental grief here.]

So the peddler woman put on the silk bodice. And the queen took a bath and strung pearls in her hair and put on the wooden bodice. "We will stand facing the Sun God, and from our breasts a stream of milk will come out, to the princes. God is the witness,... and we will have justice, it is a matter of truthful *dharma*."

So the peddler woman thought, "O ho, I'll be wearing a silk blouse, so a stream of milk will come from my breast but from a wooden bodice, what could come but ashes?"

When the Sun God rose both princes stood in front of them, Sayar and Nir stood there. And the king and the other queen were watching, and the villagers were watching nearby, and the whole caravan was watching. The Sun God's rays came, and the wooden bodice split open, and from both breasts to the princes, Sayar and Nir, streams of milk shot straight into their mouths. They got wet. But from the silk blouse [on the peddler woman] not even sweat came. Then the people said, and everyone said, "Brother, these are the queen's princes, not even a drop came from the silk blouse person, but the wooden bodice split, the heart split. Look streams of milk shot straight to both princes."

Like her bodice, Damayanti's heart splits with love for her sons. A similar scene closes Ajmer 93, followed by Damayanti's generous gifts to the peddler woman who has fostered her boys, hinting at a female solidarity that heals their rivalry.

In concluding, I believe Rajasthani women's versions of the Nal-Damayanti tale as described in this chapter have more than names in common with the Sanskrit epic and its many variants. Concerns with fate and marriage, and with human identity, are clearly shared. However, women's vernacular tellings infuse the tale with their own perspectives and interests, shaping a rather different story in the end. These female versions have an evident didactic message—shared with other women's worship stories—as we have already observed:

Men ought not to trifle with women's ritual power. King Nal should have respected Damayanti as someone capable of independent actions in her worship of Dasa Mata. However, Damayanti's independence in religious knowledge does not make her a separate being from Nal. The goddess she worships punishes them as a couple when Nal, in his blind and obstinate masculinity, denies her divinity and power. Damayanti's superior knowledge does not save her; Nal's ignorant and willful fault becomes a shared misfortune for husband and wife in their unity.

In women's tellings, the problem of human identity is only in part attributable to the fusing of a married pair. And the solution is not necessarily self-knowledge or self-recognition, as it seems to be in the epic. Rather, identity in the women's tellings emerges from recognition given by others who inhabit the same social universe. Thus, in the vernacular tales we see selfhoods created, transacted and transformed, not just between husband and wife but among siblings, parents and children, kings and subjects, masters and servants, women and female companions. Prayers to Dasa Mata made among clusters of women, rather than epic conflicts of the battlefield or the soul, frame the women's story. In these ritual stories, identity is also a gift mutually bestowed by worshipper and goddess, who must recognize and cherish one another for the well-being of all.

Notes

1. Research trips to India in 1980 and 1993 were supported by a fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies and a CIES Fulbright Scholar Award for Research; I am very grateful to these institutions. Without the generosity and creativity of Shobhag Kanvar, I would have no stories to tell; heartfelt thanks are also due to Ugam Purohit, Bali Gujar, Bhoju Ram Gujar, Shambhu Natisar Nath, and Vajendra Kumar Sharma. This essay was originally conceived and drafted in collaboration with Lindsey Harlan (Gold and Harlan 1998); Lindsey's ideas and research remain importantly incorporated into it. Joyce Fleuckiger's astute suggestions spurred major reconfigurations in the present draft. I have also benefited from conversations with Wendy Doniger, Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Susan Wadley.

2. In Sanskrit, a short "a" sound is assumed after a consonant, but not in Hindi. I hope it will help keep things straight, rather than confuse them, if I call the vernacular hero Nal and the Sanskrit hero Nala.
3. See Ramanujan 1986 for contrasts in the use of names between domestic and public tales.
4. See also Narayan 1997, 109–24 for a tale with similar motifs, but no use of names.
5. See Harlan 1992 and this volume, and Raheja and Gold 1994 for further descriptions of women's religious practice, and its generalized value and importance in Rajasthan.
6. Here my approach diverges from Harlan (this volume) who sees the central issue as: "Should a woman always do what her husband wants or should she sometimes know better?"
7. For another explicit example see Gold 1995a.
8. This was a casual and unrecorded communication; for Nala's life in the western classroom see Doniger 1999, 140–41.
9. See Unni who writes of the Nala and Damayanti episode: "It is almost definite that the story belonged to the repertoire of ancient Indian folk tradition, before it was incorporated into the store-house of the epic into which numerous stories are deposited" (1977, 10).
10. See Gold 2000 for a detailed discussion of four women's rituals (including Dasa Mata's Worship) and accompanying expressive traditions during this period.
11. The ritual differs slightly from house to house, caste to caste, village to village, and village to urban area. In common to all, however, are the cotton string and the storytelling.
12. This skein directly links Mother Ten's worship with the festival of Holi. Either a male household member takes the cotton yarn to the public Holi bonfire, where women would not come, and holds it briefly before the flames; or a woman takes it to the roof of her house and "shows" it the bonfire from a distance (Gold 2000).
13. A broken necklace may carry general implications of inauspiciousness (though not as acute as broken bangles). It may also suggest violence or rape. Vasudha Narayanan confirms (personal communication) that in Tamil literature a broken necklace may be construed as a sign of sexual violence because women would remove their necklaces in anticipation of consensual sex; see Gold 1996, 17–18. In Narayan and Sood 1997, the king's bad fortune begins when his male sacred

thread breaks, and his wife's ritual action, having nothing to do with string, is also separately, disrupted.

14. Ujjain is the paradigmatic royal city named in many Ghatiyali tales; however, Ugam did not give Nal's city any name in the story itself.
15. For women's *vrat* and stories see Narayan 1997; Pearson 1996; Wadley 1983.
16. A pipal tree figures, if only incidentally, in the Nal story (first swallowing up and later returning Nal and Damayanti's daughter along with their horse).
17. For more about Shobhag Kanvar see Raheja and Gold 1994, 164–81.
18. For Path Mother see Gold 1988, 196–202.
19. Three Dasa Mata stories are translated in Gold 1995b; one Ganesh*ji* story told by Shobhag Kanvar during Dasa Mata worship in 1980 appears in Raheja and Gold 1994: one story of the Greedy One told by Shobhag Kanvar in 1980 appears in Gold 1988, 7–9.
20. For Shiva and Parvati's gaming see Handelman and Shulman 1997.
21. See, for example, Keyes and Daniel, ed. 1983; Wadley and Derr 1990.
22. In the epic, the second bridegroom-choice reunites the couple; Nala wins the same Damayanti twice. In the folk tellings, it seems, she splits into two women. See Doniger 1999, 140–75 for a discussion of many versions of Nala and Damayanti in reference to recognition, divinity, humanity, and, her book's central theme, the doubling and splitting of females, divine and human.
23. Wadley (this volume, 1999) discusses a very differently elaborated, male-authored Nal story where the second marriage is very important.
24. This teller was a teacher for a government-sponsored adult education for women program, and thus had an express sense of herself as someone involved in work on behalf of women.
25. Harlan (this volume) rightly notes that to arrive at one's sister's place in need of hospitality is thoroughly against the grain of appropriate behavior in Rajasthan.

Pandvani Heroines, Chhattisgarhi Daughters

Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger

The Sanskrit, pan-Indian epics of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* have been traditionally paired by Western scholars of South Asian texts, even as that pairing reveals significant differences between the two[1] (see Smith 1980). More recent field-based scholarship has found that in folk performance, however, the two traditions are rarely paired and, in terms framing this study, do not fall within the same performative repertoire and intertextual system of genres (Sax 1991; Smith 1990; Lutgendorf 1991). In Chhattisgarh, the *Mahābhārat* folk genre of Pandvani (the name taken from the five Pandav brothers/heroes of epic) is called a Chhattisgarhi genre, whereas the much more commonly performed *Rāmāyaṇ* tradition, available in a wide variety of styles, is not. In this essay, I consider what difference it makes to indigenous understandings of Pandvani performance that the genre is situated within the *regional* repertoire, or system of genres, in which it is continually paired with the regional Candaini epic. Focusing specifically on performance of the Pandvani narrative episode of Nal and Damayanti,[2] what kind of interpretive framework does this intertextuality provide, that gives us cues as to how the narrative may be received and interpreted in situated performance?

"According to our Hearts": A Chhattisgarhi Genre

In search of Pandvani performers in the summer of 1993, I set out during an evening, hot-season dust storm on the back of the scooter

of an anthropologist from Ravishankar University, to the village of Darba, about an hour east of the city of Raipur. Over ten years earlier in this village, I had recorded a Pandvani performance of the Nal and Damayanti episode from a middle-aged blind singer of the *Marār* (vegetable-seller) caste. I hoped that he would still be living, would be willing to perform this narrative segment again, and that he and others would be able to provide some insight on Pandvani as a Chhattisgarhi genre.

During the year and a half I had spent in Chhattisgarh in 1980–81 and on several return visits in between, Pandvani was consistently mentioned as a core genre of the repertoire of genres identified as Chhattisgarhi. There were, however, no Pandvani performances in any of the villages or urban neighborhoods in which I had lived or visited during that time, except for that of the above-mentioned blind singer. At that time, although the memory of Pandvani performance still helped to identify and characterize the Chhattisgarhi folklore region (Flueckiger 1996), and there was frequent reference to it, there were few living performers who still regularly sang Pandvani in public, professional contexts.

In contrast, the Candaini oral epic tradition was continually in the public eye (and "ear") through local performances, in government-sponsored competitions, in the news media, and on the radio. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, exposure of this epic tradition outside of Chhattisgarh was promoted by playwright and director Habib Tanvir, who wrote and staged a contemporary dramatic work based on Candaini, using Chhattisgarhi actors and traditional performers, in New Delhi and other urban centers, even as far away as London.

In the early 1990s, Pandvani performance experienced a dramatic performance revival and popularity comparable to that of Candaini in the 1980s, particularly as representative of "things Chhattisgarhi." Like Candaini, it came to represent the region among folklore and intellectual circles outside of Chhattisgarh, in various government-sponsored performance competitions, as well as on radio and television. This was largely due to the influence of one particular female Pandvani singer, Tijan Bai, in whom, according to many

Chhattisgarhi residents, the government (and subsequent audiences and singing competition judges) showed particular interest because of her uniqueness as a woman in public, professional performance. (Other young women followed in her lead, and the female performer of choice in the media in 1993 was the sixteen-year-old Ritu Varma.)

Tijan Bai frequently appeared on Doordarshan (the government-sponsored television channel), sang in various folk festivals in Delhi and other urban centers, received various national-level performance and artistic awards, and in the summer of 1993 participated in the Festival of India in Paris. She dressed the part of a "typical" Chhattisgarhi villager, wearing easily identifiable Chhattisgarhi jewelry, although some pieces are actually only rarely seen in the gullies and streets of Chhattisgarh today (both because of the expense of gold and the attitude held by educated women that this jewelry is "backward"). Tijan Bai accompanied herself on a colorfully decorated and painted *tambūrā* (single-stringed instrument), which has come to be specifically identified with Pandvani performance.[3] Tijan Bai's success and popularity revived Pandvani performance all over Chhattisgarh in a variety of contexts. Hence, I anticipated an increased awareness of the genre in the village in which we found ourselves on that hot, dusty evening in May.

The Brahmin village headman with whom I had stayed in Darba village and in whose courtyard I had taped Pandvani in the 1980s had since moved to Raipur to live with one of his sons. His large, two-storied house in the middle of the village was now empty except for a few servants and his Brahmin *darogā* (overseer of the estate). After cups of tea and general discussion with the *darogā* and several other men who had gathered in the courtyard about shifting caste dynamics caused by increased industrialization in nearby Raipur and an associated demise of many Chhattisgarhi folk performance genres, the *darogā* assured us that the blind Pandvani singer, Mani Ram, was still living and sent someone to call him. Meanwhile, he asked if we would like to watch a tape of the T.V. *Mahābhārat* on the VCR while we were waiting. I hesitated, feeling somehow that this would "corrupt" the setting for what I hoped would be the

forthcoming Pandvani performance as soon as the singer arrived. However, the question was rhetorical; and soon, seated in the courtyard under a dark, moonless sky, a group of twenty or so children, women, and the male servants of the estate were gathered with rapt attention in front of a tiny, black and white screen on which stiffly acted characters spoke Sanskritic Hindi that few of the audience could fully understand.

To my dismay, the drone of the T.V. *Mahābhārat* continued as a backdrop to our conversation when Mani Ram finally arrived at 11 p.m. It was now too late to start a performance; but, he assured me he would return in the morning to sing (albeit without the naturally congregated audience that was present late that night). The T.V. performance, however, provided an important opening in my conversation with the singer. When I asked him what difference there was between this T.V. *Mahābhārat* and Pandvani, his answer was immediate and decisive: "The *Mahābhārat* of the T.V. is according to the *śāstras*; Pandvani is according to our hearts. Pandvani is *Chhattisgarhi.*" Another singer later answered a similar question thus: "The T.V. is for everyone; there are many written *Mahābhārats*. This [Pandvani] stands alone. Those who read from paper, they know the T.V. *Mahābhārat*."

A third singer, Pancham, who makes his living as an electrical appliance (radios, televisions, fans) repairman was puzzled when I expressed to him my specific interest in the Nal and Damayanti narrative and asked him if this episode was in the repertoire of his performance troupe. He assured me it was, but asked:

[Pancham] Can't you do this research by reading? Whatever you want to know, you'll find in writing.
[Indian anthropologist who accompanied me to this village] No, there's some difference between the books and what you sing. The things you enjoy [*majedār bāt*], like the weddings of Sahadev and Nakula, you won't find those there.
[Pancham] If you printed everything we sing and put it in the bazaar [i.e., in books to sell], it would take up from here to there [extending his arms out wide]. But, that's stopping now. At first, those who sang Pandvani sang

every detail: they came by this road, they passed this village—they sang about every well, river, and *talāb* [tank]. Nowadays, what do they do? They come from there 'direct'[4] to here.

What does it mean for a performance genre to be "Chhattisgarhi," to be sung according to the heart rather than the *śāstras*? Note: I use the word *śāstra*/shastric with the connotations implied by Mani Ram—as a textually based, pan-Indian performance tradition shared across regional boundaries, to be distinguished from what are perceived to be uniquely Chhattisgarhi (regional) traditions.[5]

I first looked for the answer to this question in the verbal, transcribed texts of the three full performances of the Nal and Damayanti narrative that I recorded in the summer of 1993, suspecting that the Chhattisgarhi versions of the narrative would reflect a particularly regional, rather than what our singer calls "shastric," vision of women, fate, and divine intervention. While some of these can be found, the Pandvani performance styles and the genre's place within a distinct Chhattisgarhi repertoire are just as crucial in its definition as a Chhattisgarhi genre.

Before beginning our analysis, I provide a synopsis of both the Nal and Damayanti episode of Pandvani and the oral epic Candaini with which Pandvani is so often paired. Both are long, sung narratives that reflect and create a unique Chhattisgarhi ethos in both content and performance style.

The Nal and Damayanti Narrative

There are numerous variations and localizations reflected in the Nal and Damayanti Pandvani performances I heard; but on the level of plot, the performances follow the general contours of the Sanskrit narrative amazingly closely.[6] Perhaps this should not be surprising since the shastric narrative of Nal and Damayanti already shares certain features which seem to characterize an alternative vision of gender, in particular, as compared to the rest of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*. As Van Buitenan elaborates in the introduction to his translation of Book 3 of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, *The Book of the Forest*, (1975:182–85), Nal and Damayanti is already a female-

centered tale, with an active heroine, and a narrative with a folktale-like, domestic quality.

The story of the heroine Damayanti and hero Nal is told to the eldest Pandav brother, Yudhishtar (in forest exile, mourning the loss of his kingdom), by the ṛṣi Brihadasva. The ṛṣi tells the story of Raja Nal, who suffered even more greatly than Yudhishtar. Nal, king of Nishadha, was the most beautiful of men and Damayanti the beautiful princess of Vidarbha. A pair of geese serves as matchmaker between the two, sparking the love between them through descriptions of their respective beauty. Damayanti's lovesickness is reported to her father, who decides it is time to call for her *svayamvar* (the ritual in which a princess publicly chooses her husband from among all interested suitors). Kings and princes from all over the world arrive in hopes of being chosen by the exquisite princess (the *svayamvar* characterized, in one Chhattisgarhi performance, as a "beauty competition," to which "kings from 'America,' 'England,' 'Australia,' 'everywhere' arrived"). Nal adorns himself and joins in the royal migration towards Vidharba.

The gods, too, hear of the *svayamvar*; and four of them decide to attend; in the Sanskrit version, they truly hope that one of them will be chosen as the bridegroom, whereas in the Chhattisgarhi version, they attend the *svayamvar* in order to test the love of Nal and Damayanti. On the way, they meet Raja Nal and ask that he serve as their messenger to the princess, informing her of their intentions. Nal miraculously finds entry into the palace and delivers the message, to which Damayanti replies that since this is a ritual of true self-choice, she will marry only Raja Nal. When the gods hear her reply, they arrive at the *svayamvar* as (what the Chhattisgarhi singer calls) "duplicates" of Nal. In the Sanskrit version, the princess beseeches the gods, by the power of her truthfulness, to reveal their divinity; only then is she able to discern who among the five is the human Nal because only the gods do not sweat, blink, or touch the ground with their feet. The kings and gods return to their respective realms, rejoicing in what they know to be an auspicious match.

One god, Kali, however, was late to the *svayamvar*. Angered, he vows to make the princess pay for her choice of a human over the

gods by unseating Nal from his kingdom. For twelve years, however, the nearly-perfect Nal commits no transgression through which Kali can initiate his plan. Then, one morning, Nal fails to perform the appropriate ablutions before worship; this is Kali's opportunity to enter his body and take advantage of his defects (*durguṇ*). As the Chhattisgarhi Kali says, "Every man has his defect, and Nal's is dicing." Kali sends his brother Dvarpa to persuade Nal's brother Pushkar (who had already lost everything he owned through earlier dicing) to challenge Nal to a dicing competition. The dice are loaded and Nal loses his throne and all his possessions until he and Damayanti are left with only a single garment each; and they are banished to the forest.

Upon Pushkar's threat of hanging anyone who helps the couple, no one in the kingdom offers them even a drop of water. After three days, Nal sees a pair of birds and throws his only garment over them in an effort to capture them for food; but they fly off leaving the king naked. Now the couple wanders the forest, sharing Damayanti's single sari. Nal tries to persuade his wife to return to her mother's place without him, but she is a true *pativratā* (faithful wife) and refuses. One night, as the couple has laid down to rest and Damayanti has fallen fast asleep, Nal carefully cuts the shared sari in two and abandons his love at the crossroads.

Damayanti awakens to find herself alone and desperately calls out for her husband before realizing her dreadful fate. She has numerous adventures in the forest before finally finding her way back to her father's kingdom of Vidharba. Nal, meanwhile, has his own forest adventures. He saves a snake from a fire, but is repaid with a snake bite that leaves him cruelly deformed. The snake assures him that the deformity will serve to disguise him when he needs such protection. He promises the king that the poison that has entered his body will afflict only Kali and will cause him no pain; further, he will always be victorious in battle. He advises Nal to offer his services as a charioteer to the king of Ayodhya.

Meanwhile, Damayanti has sent scouts throughout the land, looking for her husband. She instructs them to ask of all they meet a riddle that only Nal would be able to answer. One such scout

enters the city of Ayodhya, and the king's charioteer gives the answer to the riddle. When Damayanti hears his answer, she knows Nal is alive and holds a second *svayamvar*, hoping to lure him back from his exile. The king of Ayodhya instructs his charioteer, the disguised Nal, to deliver him to the *svayamvar* in a single day. On the way, they pass a *vibhīṭak* tree and the king, wishing to display his skill in counting, tells Nal the difference in the number of leaves and nuts on the tree and those on the ground. Nal insists on stopping to verify the count; it is exactly as the king has said. Nal then asks for the knowledge of this magic, offering in return the secret of his charioteering skills. As soon as Nal receives the secret of counting (the secret of dice), Kali is vomited out of his mouth.

At Vidharba, Damayanti sends her servant to ask the identity of the deformed charioteer who makes the chariot fly as only Nal can do. She poses a series of tests through which she knows that he can be, in fact, only her love. Finally, Nal admits who he is; and after having endured a three-year separation, the couple is reunited. Nal returns to his own kingdom to challenge his brother Pushkar to one final dice game, through which he successfully reclaims his throne. And so, the narrator asks Yudhishtar, "Hearing of the misery and grief of Raja Nal, what is the basis of *your* complaint?"

The Candaini Narrative

The following summary is drawn from performances I attended, as well as from conversations with performers and audiences. I have noted some of the major differences between the Chhattisgarhi and the Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) versions of the epic. In Chhattisgarh, Candaini is the love/elopement story of the hero Lorik and heroine Candaini, both from the Raut cowherding caste, whereas in U.P., the epic is a martial epic. Both versions begin with the hero Lorik and heroine Candaini married to other partners, but Candaini leaves her husband when she learns he has been cursed by the goddess to be impotent for twelve years. On her way back to her maternal village, Candaini is accosted in the jungle by the lowest-caste Bathua. She cleverly escapes his evil intentions, but he chases after her and

terrorizes the inhabitants and cattle of her home village. In desperation, the villagers ask Lorik to rescue them; ultimately he defeats Bathua through nonmartial (and rather dishonest) means. During this contest, Candaini first lays eyes on the hero, falls in love, and proceeds to seduce him. After some delays, primarily due to Lorik's hesitancy and cowardice in decision-making, the hero leaves his wife, and he and Candaini elope together to Hardi Garh.

In Chhattisgarh, Candaini performances center upon and elaborate various adventures from this elopement journey (*urḥai*; lit., "flight"). When I asked villagers what the story was about, most responses began with some variant of, "It is the story of the elopement of Lorik and Candaini." The focus on the elopement reflects a particularly female-centered worldview. Candaini's resourcefulness and courage are illustrated in numerous episodes, such as one in which the eloping couple reaches a kingdom of all women. Candaini sends Lorik into the town to buy them some betel leaf (*pān*). He is tricked by the *pān*-seller to follow her home, where she "keeps her best *pān*" (to feed *pān* to a member of the opposite sex in Chhattisgarhi folklore is to initiate a sexual relationship). Once the *pān*-seller has trapped Lorik in her house, she threatens to beat him with a bamboo pole and stuff his skin with straw, poke his eyes out with a needle, and finally, to brand him with a hot crowbar unless he promises to marry her. After each threat, he gives in, only to recant a few minutes later. Finally, Candaini comes looking for Lorik and meets the *pān*-seller in the bazaar. The *pān*-seller begs Candaini to help her with a man who refuses to marry her. Candaini discovers a sari-clad Lorik in the woman's courtyard, having been so disguised so as to hide his male identity in the all-female kingdom. Once his identity is made known, the two women agree to play a round of dice to determine who will win him as husband. Candaini triumphs in the dice game and frees Lorik from his captivity. One can hardly imagine the martial hero of the U.P. variants of the epic permitting the *pān*-seller's physical humiliations to be forced upon him or to be dependent upon rescue by a woman in a women's world.

After some years of living in Hardi Garh (a time period glossed over by epic performers), Lorik receives word that his brothers have

all died in battle, and their wealth and cattle dissipated throughout the Chhattisgarhi countryside, leaving his mother and wife destitute. Lorik returns home with Candaini to avenge his family's honor. He succeeds in reclaiming his cattle, through battle in the U.P. variant and by wandering the countryside as a mendicant, collecting his cattle, in Chhattisgarh. When the task is completed, he takes up the position of head of the surviving extended family. But, it is said, Lorik did not take pride in his success. In U.P. versions, he finds that his former physical prowess and strength have dissipated, and he kills himself. In Chhattisgarh, sad and dissatisfied after his return, Lorik one day mysteriously wanders off into the countryside, never to be seen again.

Candaini and Pandvani: a Dialogic Relationship

Pandvani and Candaini share many performative features that clearly distinguish them from shastric performance genres available in Chhattisgarh, most notably Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*. These include the instruments used in accompaniment, the use of a *rāgī* (echo voice and companion to the lead singer), the *rāg* (melodic structure) itself, as well as the identities of both performers and audience and the traditional and newly emerging contexts in which Pandvani and Candaini are sung. Further, their performances are episodic (characteristic of Indian oral epics more generally), rather than approximating the recitation style of devotional texts such as the *Rāmcaritmānas*, which are often recited from beginning to end (either over a period of seven, nine, thirty days, or on a weekly basis) until they are completed. One young Pandvani singer exclaimed, "Who knows the beginning; who knows the end!" (i.e., it is not sung from beginning to end). A nonprofessional female performer said, "There are eighteen nights of Pandvani, but I sing only bits and pieces."

These performance elements and a shared female-centeredness or perspective situate Pandvani and Candaini in a broader Chhattisgarhi system of genres and poetics that creates a dialogic relationship between them. This repertoire and relationship with Candaini provide the primary lens through which Pandvani

performance, including that of the narrative of Nal and Damayanti, is interpreted by the Chhattisgarhi folklore community. Bakhtin characterizes this process of intertextuality as follows:

> Utterances are not indifferent to each other, and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another.... Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the community of the sphere of speech (1986:91).

Candaini and Pandvani are so closely associated that, in fact, the Brahmin overseer of the rural estate in Darba village, as someone who does not participate directly in the tradition as performer or audience member, but who is quite conversant with the folk repertoire performed in his village, frequently confused the two in our conversation. When I asked him the contexts in which Pandvani is performed these days in his village, he began describing a performance group in a neighboring village that was hired for particular festivals. I recognized that this was the same Candaini troupe that I had recorded twelve years earlier and asked, "Do you mean Candaini?" He quickly caught himself, "Yes, yes. Candaini. Well—Pandvani; they do it all." The electrical-repairman singer mentioned above, the leader of a six- to eight-member performance troupe, characterized contemporary Pandvani performance:

> These days, anyone can sing Pandvani [i.e., it is possible that a group that had sung Candaini exclusively twelve years ago *would* have begun to sing Pandvani in the interim]. Harijans, whom we call Satnamis, used to sing Pandvani. Rauts sang Candaini and the songs of the flute [*bā̃s gīt*]. And we [Sahus] sang Ramsaptah [term used for particular style of *Rāmāyaṇa* performance in Chhattisgarh]. In the old days, a few people knew Pandvani. *Tambūrāwālā* [lit., belonging to the stringed instrument *tambura*]—that's what people called Pandvani—and *manjīrā* [a kind of cymbal]; there used to be just two [instruments]. Now there are lots of instruments. [To add the phrase] "Listen, son; listen, brother"—that's *Mahābhārata caritra* [lit., biography, but here, more generally story]. You can tell the story [*kathā*] in two minutes or two days; that's what it's like.

Pandvani and Candaini have followed a remarkably similar course of stylistic development over the last fifteen years. Initially, both

were sung acappella, with a lead singer and a single companion (*rāgī*). The Darba singer Mani Ram, who still sings in this style, said the only difference between Candaini and Pandvani is that singers of the former add "*tor*" or "*mor*" to the end of every line and Pandvani singers add "*bhaiyā*" or "*bhaige*" (lit., brother). The style is composed of short, almost staccato couplets of nearly repetitious lines. Each couplet advances the storyline and there is little room for elaboration of scene or emotion, or commentary on motivation. Mani Ram added rather sadly that this traditional singing style is extremely rare these days in Chhattisgarh: "People have no interest without instruments."

Of these two traditions, Candaini was the first to experiment with shifting performance styles, adding instrumentation (minimally a harmonium and *ḍholak*) and more singers. Songs are interspersed with the narrative line of the lead singer, elaborating a *bhāv* (emotion), or indicating passage of time or the transversing of space. These days, the most popular Candaini style is that of the dance-drama with costumed actors (*nācā*). The primary identity of the singers shifted in this period from that of the Rauts (cowherding caste) to primarily Satnamis. It was during this period that the fame of Candaini spread beyond Chhattisgarh's borders, and urban elites began to show interest in the regional epic, in which they had not traditionally participated, as representative of "Chhattisgarh."

The Pandvani tradition followed a remarkably similar course of development, only about a decade later: from the performance style of the "old days" with the single singer and his companion (*rāgī*) to the addition of instrumentation (specifically the brightly decorated *tambūrā*) and a large performance troupe. The addition of instrumentation was crucial to reviving Pandvani as a popular style, but it has not yet been adapted to the dramatic *nācā* style. Like Candaini, the identity of Pandvani singers has expanded beyond the boundaries of its traditional performance group, Satnamis, to include a wide spectrum of castes. Finally, the "exterior of the text," to borrow a phrase from Wendy Doniger, has come to represent the region to intellectual and cultural performance communities outside of Chhattisgarh with particular interests in "things ethnic."

Pandvani and Candaini "new style" singers employ almost identical formulae to indicate breaks between episodes or the passage of time: "and so, they began to say, began to speak, ohhhh..."; or "began to go, began to move, ohhh..." ("*kathāvan lāge, bolan lāge, ooo...; calan lāge, jāvan lāge, ooo...*"). Contemporary Pandvani and Candaini *rāgī*s (respondents) often interact with the lead performer in humorous ways. This humor differs from the humorous interludes in Ramlila dramatic performances because they are not performatively distinct episodes; rather, they punctuate the primary narrative. "Listen" to the following excerpt taken from the first few minutes of the performance, when the lead singer, Manmohan (whose performance we will look at more carefully later) is describing Damayanti's fragile state of *viraha* (separation from her love, Nal):

Singer:... The *rājkumārī*'s [unmarried princess] condition deteriorated. Damayanti burned in the fire of separation [*viraha*], in the separation from the love of Raja Nal.

Ragi: Oh, with the fever of *ṭimbu* [local vegetable]?

Singer: No, in the fever of love. The *rājkumārī* worried twenty-four hours a day; she was struck with worry; she was immersed in thought.

Ragi: Oh, she worried about the tap [play on words between word for tap/*nal* and name of the hero/Nal]!

Singer: No, no! This is about Raja Nal, not about "boring" *nal*! [what tubewells in Chhattisgarh are called].

Beyond the emergence of similar performative styles, performers of the two genres of Candaini and Pandvani employ several narrative motifs and formulaic descriptions that resonate with each other in performance. The heroines Candaini and Damayanti are both Chhattisgarhi daughters, identified by the formulaic sixteen *śṛṅgār* (adornments),[7] several of which are unique to Chhattisgarh and worn by female professional Pandvani singers such as Tijan Bai (for example, the *bandūriya* necklace and *kaṇkaṇī* armband). In contrast, the *Rāmāyaṇ* heroine Sita is described and visually portrayed in lithographs and in the dramatic performance genre of Ramlilas as wearing vaguely generic north Indian royal clothes and jewelry. The two heroines, Candaini and Damayanti, are also both accompanied

by the formulaic "fourteen companions, seven in front and seven behind"; they live in similar seven-storied palaces, in quarters tightly guarded, into which the heroes of their stories must try to enter.

Because of the generic association and performative relationship between Candaini and Pandvani, audience members who hear of the daughter Damayanti stranded in the middle of the jungle, threatened by a hunter, are more likely to make an association with the heroine Candaini in the jungle, where she relies on her own ingenuity to get out of a similar situation, than with Sita in her forest dwelling, from which she is abducted by the demon king Ravan. Damayanti is not, of course, the eloping Candaini. She is a *pativratā* (faithful wife), and finally depends on the power of her *sat* (truth, i.e., chastity) to escape the hunter who attempts to accost her in the jungle after she has been deserted by Nal; but the power is humanized. In Mani Ram's performance of this episode, Damayanti successfully curses the hunter, but then wanders the forest as a crazy woman whose sanity is restored only when she tells her story to those who take her in as a daughter (an indigenous commentary on the power of story and performance). In these lines, Mani Ram specifically uses the term "*nonī*," the affectionate term for daughter in several dialect variants of Chhattisgarhi. In the performance by the Sahu-caste singer, Damayanti also finally resorts to her power as a *pativratā* to curse the hunter to die, but not before trying a strategy available to all Chhattisgarhi women, and that is to appeal to the stranger as a daughter, a sister. The hunter's inhumane self is only underscored by the fact that he cannot be shamed into responding appropriately to this strategy.

The dicing motif shared between the two traditions, and yet distinctively different, is of particular interest to us here, given the centrality of dicing to the Nal and Damayanti narrative. Recall from the earlier summary of Candaini that as Lorik and Candaini are passing through an all-female kingdom, Lorik, disguised in a sari, is sent into the city by Candaini to buy some *pān*. He is enticed into the home of the *pān*-seller and imprisoned. When Candaini finally comes looking for him, she secures his release by winning him back

in a dicing duel with the *pān*-seller. The motif of women, rather than men, winning and losing partners through dicing is common in several other Chhattisgarhi folk narratives as well. Although Nal's dicing in Pandvani obviously follows a more "shastric," male dicing motif, Chhattisgarhi audiences will not receive this dicing scene in the same way as would audiences of the "same" narrative outside of the Chhattisgarhi repertoire. In one performance, the singer localizes the dicing between the brothers Nal and Pushkar when he characterizes it to be like the custom of male friends and relatives gambling through the night as they celebrate the (Chhattisgarhi) festival of Gaura/Gauri (the wedding of the god and goddess Shiva and Parvati). The performer rhetorically asked his audience, "After all, don't all brothers play dice at the festival?" In this version, there is no mention of the influence of Kali or any other outside force on the dicing scene.

Finally, both Candaini and the Pandvani narrative of Nal and Damayanti are love stories in which the love is first characterized by the heroine's self-choice (elopement for Candaini and *svayamvar* for Damayanti) and then her determination to hold on to that choice against overwhelming odds. The heroes of both stories are seemingly less committed to their love when obstacles are placed in their way. Lorik gets cold feet and tries to back out of the elopement several times before he is almost literally dragged by a washerwoman to the tree where he is to meet Candaini; Nal carries the message of the gods to Damayanti with the suggestion that since they are gods, after all, whose anger can destroy the world, she should *really* choose one of them as her husband.

The heroines, however, are undeterred in their choice. Damayanti asserts that the choice she has made in her heart, long before the *svayamvar*, is equivalent to marriage itself: "I've already accepted you as my husband; I'll marry no one else." Furthermore, she orders Nal to take this message back to the gods, with the following instruction about the nature of true "self-choice" in the *svayamvar*:

> The meaning of a *svayamvar* is that one chooses according to her heart. In this *darbār* [court], there is no fear; there is no force. Whomever the girl garlands, that is her husband. Whomever I desire, that is whom I will garland.

There's no sin in this, no reproach; it's nothing like that. Go and tell them this!

Kali, the god who is angered over having missed the *svayamvar* and instigates Nal's downfall in the dicing match of the Sanskrit version of the narrative, in the Chhattisgarhi version later criticizes the heroine for this very independence, which she has said is above reproach at a *svayamvar*: "This ordinary [*sādhāran*] girl is too proud [*ghamaṇḍ*] [i.e., thinking she can choose a human over the gods]. I'm going to tear apart this union," which he succeeds in doing, though only temporarily.

The narratives of Candaini and Damayanti characterize an ideal love as not only one of erotic passion but also companionship. The forest scenes give literal space for this companionship to be externalized. Candaini and Lorik face obstacle after obstacle together, alone against the world they encounter in foreign countries and the jungle. They cook together, make rafts together, plot against and trick enemies together. Of course, the story of Nal and Damayanti dwells on the betrayal of just such companionship.

In summarizing the story for me outside of performance, one singer started with the frame story of the *Mahābhārat* hero Yudhishtar:

The story begins here: there was Arjun; Arjun leaves them all, the four [other Pandav] brothers and Draupadi;... and over here, there's Bhim; Bhim also goes by himself to wander; Dharm Raja is left all by himself, Yudhishtar....

[A *ṛṣi* finds the weeping king, who complains,] "What's the use of having so many brothers and such a big family? There's no one in the world with greater grief than I have.... Having left behind such a large kingdom, leaving the entire family, I have come into the jungle... but... now there's no one here to give me companionship."

The *ṛṣi*, standing in front of him, says, "Son, do you think that you're disconsolate? You're most fortunate; you won't find anyone so fortunate, even if you look.... I know everything: that your kingdom has been lost, your brothers defeated. You came to do *tapasyā* [austerities] in the jungle, and now in the jungle, you have no company.... Son, if you think you're disconsolate, you haven't even seen sorrow. What you think of as sorrow is actually your flower. What is sorrow like? Let me tell you about Raja Nal."

[the singer continues] Whoever tells the story in our caste [Sahu] has to start the story with this question, "What is sorrow; what is happiness?"

Yudhishtar's sad state is attributed by the *ṛṣi* as one resulting from lack of companionship; by so framing the story that follows, he similarly characterizes the sorrowful separation of the lovers Nal and Damayanti as the loss of companionship.

Another singer elaborates on what true companionship means in the uniquely Chhattisgarhi terms of ritual friendship (ritually solemnized friendships between same-sex, cross-caste friends). This test of true friendship/companionship, rather than that of erotic love alone, is the test that the hero Nal fails. In this performance, Damayanti responds to Nal when he tries to persuade her to leave him in the forest and return to her mother's place. She first calls on shastric authority and then switches to "Chhattisgarhi" authority when she recalls the mode of ritual friendship (*mahāprasād*):

The shastras say, "Whatever patience, whatever stamina a man has, it will be tested. Whatever *dharma* he follows, the test of that *dharma* is the test of friendship: that is, [the test of] *mahāprasād, phūlphūlvārī* [names of specific kinds Chhattisgarhi ritual friendships]—these are tested.

One could say a woman's test is calamity. Yes, it's good to have a *mahāprasād* friend and for this friendship to survive calamity. Whoever stays with another in sorrow and happiness, that is the friendship of *mahāprasād*.... You're experiencing such suffering, such trouble; I won't leave you, my master.

The king then understood that she was no ordinary woman who would leave him.

Performative Crossroads of Two Poetics

In contrast to the oral epic Candaini, Pandvani has been picked up by many "shastric," *Rāmāyaṇ* performance troupes. The consecutive, year-long television serializations of the *Rāmāyaṇ* and *Mahābhārat* that riveted India in the late 1980s have placed these two traditions in a performative/generic relationship with each other that did not traditionally exist in Chhattisgarh; the *Rāmāyaṇ* tradition is dharmic/shastric, whereas Pandvani is regional, local, and not normative in

the sense that the shastric devotional text of the Hindi *Rāmcaritmānas* is. It is difficult to say whether the television phenomenon "permitted" *Rāmāyaṇ* performance troupes to add Pandvani to their repertoire by legitimizing the *Mahābhārat* in some way, or if this innovation has been in response to the increasing popularity of Pandvani in Chhattisgarh itself.

Let us look more closely now at a performance by such a troupe, whose repertoire includes a Chhattisgarhi genre of *Rāmāyaṇ* called Ramsaptah, Pandvani, and even periodically Candaini (although *Rāmāyaṇ* performances are most common). As its lead singer says, "Whatever people call us for, that's what we'll sing." The newly emerging performance configuration between Pandvani and *Rāmāyaṇ* has influenced the Pandvani performance style of this troupe dramatically. In the particular performance under consideration, the performer negotiated between a regional poetics and the more shastric and devotional poetics, a *Rāmāyaṇ*-like performance style, incorporating elements of each. This particular audience, however, still understood Pandvani to be firmly situated within the regional repertoire. This variance in the intertextual context the audience members and singer, respectively, brought to the performance resulted in audience-performer negotiations at some points, and finally for the audience, a disappointing ending.

In my search for Damayanti in the Chhattisgarhi countryside, I had initiated this particular performance, although it played itself out before a "traditional" audience in a Gond neighborhood on the outskirts of the town of Dhamtari. I had learned of the lead singer Manmohan Sinha from a man who periodically performed with his troupe and who was a neighbor of the Gond friends I was visiting. The performance took place in the front courtyard of their house, next to the major thoroughfare of the village-like neighborhood.

Manmohan was a forty-five year old high-school graduate who made his living as a day laborer (and was, at the time of this performance, hired as a construction worker). He said his grandfather had also been a professional performer; and it was from him that he had learned "whatever it is that I know." After what I, as a nontraditional Pandvani patron, felt to be some rather awkward

negotiations of an appropriate performance fee, Manmohan agreed to come the next night to perform for three hours. He contemplated whether or not he would be able to sing the entire Nal and Damayanti story in that limited amount of time, but concluded it would, with some effort, be possible. He was rather emphatic that, after working all day in 115-degree heat, he would not be able to perform longer than the three hours he agreed to. The initially scheduled performance was canceled due to an unexpected, dramatic hot-season downpour. My Gond hosts assured me, however, that the troupe would show up the next night, since I had given Manmohan a "good faith" down payment; and they did.

Arriving at 9:30 p.m. from a village about seven kilometers away, the performers were served tea and *bīḍī*s (leaf cigarettes) before Manmohan carefully unwrapped his brightly painted and decorated *tambūrā*, creating a key performance frame for Pandvani as a Chhattisgarhi, rather than "Hindi" (shastric), performance. He set up a large lithograph of the divine baby Krishna on a folding chair at one end of the courtyard, performed *ārtī* (lamp-offering to the deity) and lit incense. By this time, word of the troupe's arrival had spread through the neighborhood, and an audience of approximately fifty had gathered, two-thirds of whose members were middle-aged or older women. As Manmohan was setting up, I asked several of the women whether they knew the story of Nal and Damayanti that was about to be sung. They assured me it was common knowledge, but one woman said she (and probably most of the others) had not heard it performed for ten or fifteen years. Still, she said, "We *should* know it, shouldn't we?"[8]

Manmohan's opening scene is that of the geese (*hans*) who, through their descriptions of the beauty of our hero and heroine, "awakened the *bhāv* [emotion] of love in the hearts of Nal and Damayanti.[9] Love was born on both sides." The narrative is set up, then, as a love story, one whose full ripening is assured when the performer then calls upon the authority of Swami Tulsidas, author of the authoritative *Rāmcaritmānas* (which came as a complete surprise to me, based on my experience of more traditional Pandvani performances), whom he quotes as having said:

If love remains true,
If love one for another remains steadfast,
Then the two will surely meet each other.
One will receive the other.

In this version, the gods come to Damayanti's *svayamvar*, not as serious contestants, but to test the unusual love they have heard about. The gods say, "We'll go to the *svayamvar*. If their love is that great, we'll go to test it. If the love is true, from the heart, then, we'll have to find out about it; we'll have to test it."

When the four gods come to the ceremony, all in the guise of Nal, Damayanti calls on the goddesses Sharada Mai and Sarasvati Dai; but then "an idea comes to her" to appeal to the gods as a daughter (the same strategy used with the hunter in the jungle):

Prostrating at their feet; joining her hands, Damayanti said, "You're the father; I'm your offspring, like a daughter. With my heart, words, acts and soul, I've [already] accepted Raja Nal as my husband. Protect me, help me, so that I can identify Nal, so that I can garland Nal.

I'm like your daughter; I'm dependent on you.... And if you test me in this, if you challenge me, and I can't identify Nal, I'll commit 'suicide'! All my faults and sins will be on your heads."

[*rāgī* responds], 'Murder' will be committed.

"All my faults and sins will be on your heads." In this way, Damayanti spoke to the gods; and the gods understood that her love was genuine. "Her love is absolutely true; it's a love from the heart. She has 'passed' the test of love. She's succeeded. We'll give her our true *darśan*." And the four gods took their true forms and went away.

Of course, the rest of the narrative continues to test that love; it is guaranteed fruition not only because of Tulsidas's reassurance that true love is rewarded (particularly in the context of devotional texts), but also because of the intertextuality with genres such as Candaini, in which the heroine is resourceful and clever and finally succeeds in achieving her goals.

But now, to return to Tulsidas's voice of authority—it suggests a shastric performance frame for the Ramayanization, if you will, of Pandvani. (We will see that this process is not complete, however,

and at the end of the performance causes the audience some consternation.). The narrative recitation of the lead singer is interspersed with sung portions by the *maṇḍalī* (performance troupe) of men accompanying him. Some of these songs simply repeat or elaborate what the lead singer has narrated; but many others end with lines that approximate those of Ram *bhajan*s (devotional hymns), totally unrelated to the narrative storyline. For example, Manmohan sings of the gods' meeting with Nal on his way to the *svayamvar*:

[spoken] The gods arrived in front of Raja Nal and said:
[sung, with accompanying musicians joining in]
Oh Siya Ram, Lakhan, Siya, Ram; oh Ram, oh Siya Ram.
[The gods spoke, oh Ram, Siya Ram; they joined their hands and spoke, oh Ram, Siya Ram.][10]

These *bhajan*-styled songs, usually ending with the line, "*Bolo bṛṇdāvan bihārī lāl kī jai*" (Recite/speak the praises of [the god Krishna] Brindavan's Biharilal) are the most obvious indication that the lead singer has situated his Pandvani performance in a shastric *bhakti* (devotional) repertoire and in an intertextual relationship with the *bhakti Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulsidas. He also uses periodic *bhakti* idioms in the narrative line itself; such as that voiced by Damayanti when she expresses her commitment to Nal as her husband when he brings the message from the gods that they will be coming to her *svayamvar*:

Ever since I heard your praises from the geese, I've worshipped you [*pūjā kiyā*] like a god. If I marry anyone, it will be you. Maharaj, whatever happens, I don't want the happiness of heaven. I only want the happiness of your feet [*caraṇ*]. I'll be content only in your service [*sevā*]. I won't marry anyone else.

The word used for worship (*pūjā*) carries specific connotations of worshipping the physical image of a deity, and the word *sevā* is closely associated with *bhakti* (devotion). So, too, the singer uses the the word *caraṇ* for feet, often used in devotional contexts, rather than the more colloquial Chhattisgarhi word for feet, *pair*.

Echoes of the shastric and Chhattisgarhi repertoires with which Manmohan's performance of Nal and Damayanti is in dialogue continue to play off of each other throughout his performance. Even as he is citing Tulsidas or singing Ram-type *bhajans*, a consistent relationship with the Chhattisgarhi performance repertoire is maintained through the instrumentation and, most particularly, through the active dialogue with the *rāgī*, whose "*haṅ*," "*ho*," or humorous one-line responses (often misinterpretations of particular words used by the lead singer) literally punctuate the performance, line by line, even phrase by phrase.

Two-and-a-half hours into the three-hour performance, Manmohan had carried the narrative only as far as the *svayamvar*. He told his audience, "Time is precious; I'm going to have to shorten this a bit," to which the *rāgī* responded, "Yes, hurry it up!" This created a dramatic break in the performance rhythm. The singer intended to skip over the wedding of Nal and Damayanti with the cryptic line, "And so, according to our Hindu 'customs,' the wedding was fulfilled and wedding songs were sung." But the women of the audience insisted on more—that Damayanti, whom they considered to be a Chhattisgarhi bride be sent off to her *sasurāl* (in-laws' place) with the appropriate wedding songs, Chhattisgarhi *vīha gīt* (one of the genres regularly mentioned as part of the Chhattisgarhi performance repertoire). Manmohan resisted their pleas and tried to continue; after all, *vīhā gīt* are an exclusively female genre. But the women prevailed and, reluctantly, the entire *maṇḍalī* launched into the wedding songs in a *dehātī* (village-style) Chhattisgarhi. The initial song brought on a much longer description of the wedding itself, followed by more *vīhā gīt*, this time sung with full enthusiasm. These songs, then, firmly established Damayanti as a Chhattisgarhi bride and the women of the audience as key participants in the shaping of the performance, and who became noticeably more verbal and interactive after this incident.[11]

The expectations of the shastric/*bhakti* performance style and that of Chhattisgarhi Pandvani came into direct conflict only at the very end of the performance. By 1:30 in the morning, Nal and

Damayanti had only reached the crossroads in the jungle where, exhausted, Damayanti fell asleep. Like the Sanskrit hero, the Chhattisgarhi Nal experiences great inner conflict about whether or not to leave Damayanti; but, he finally turns from her:

He was of two minds, arguing back and forth.
Half said, "Yes, yes"; but he came back.
He saw in front of him the body of Damayanti.
He cried... tears filled his eyes.
There, a king's daughter, sleeping without being bid farewell.
...
He went and came several times; but Raja Nal finally left Damayanti.

[Song]:
My queen was left all alone, *bhaiyā mor* [Candaini performative end-phrase].
He left her all alone in the jungle.

The singer then describes the nature of the "vehicle" of a household, one needing both man and woman, that has now been broken; Nal leaves the union, alone; Damayanti awakens and calls out for her partner, but realizes she has been left, alone. Manmohan ends the narrative performance with the line: "the woman was left alone in the jungle": Damayanti abandoned at the crossroads. And the audience is left with the devotional closing line: "*Bolo bṛndāvan bihārī lāl kī jai.*" Turning to me, Manmohan asked that I turn off the tape recorder, then said, "It's late. I'm finished."

The women in the audience were aghast, "But you can't leave our daughter in the middle of the jungle!" Manmohan answered simply, "Well, you know the story." Perhaps the performer was capable of suspending the performance in the middle of an episode because of the influence of the traditional shastric style of the *Rāmcaritmānas* performance, where the goal is to create and elaborate the various *bhāv* (emotions) of *bhakti*, rather than to sustain a narrative. V. Narayana Rao has articulated this difference as one between performances whose purpose is "communion," and those whose purpose is "communication" (oral communication). In the recitation of a devotional text, an episode or scene may be suspended midway, to be picked up again the next day or the next week. But

this is a *bhakti* aesthetics. Here, in a Chhattisgarhi performance, for an audience of Chhattisgarhi daughters, it was not acceptable to leave Damayanti at the crossroads over night, and the women were still complaining at the community tap (*nal*) the next morning as they filled their water vessels. Perhaps this reaction to a devotional aesthetics capable of leaving Damayanti at the crossroads, alone in the middle of the jungle, more than any other, articulates what it means for the Chhattisgarhi Pandvani to be sung "according to our hearts."

Notes

1. I use the Hindi spelling Nal instead of the Sanskrit spelling Nala, and *Rāmāyaṇ* rather than *Rāmāyaṇa*, etc. The indigenous analytic terms for the two pan-Indian epics, *Rāmāyaṇ* and *Mahābhārat*, distinguish them as separate genres: *itihas* (history) for the *Mahābhārat* and *kāvya* (poetry) or *caritra* (biography) for the *Rāmāyaṇ*. The distinction is a literary one, however; one of the Pandvani singers I spoke to used *caritra* for the *Mahābhārat* in the general sense of "story."
2. I specifically elicited the Nal and Damayanti episode from the Pandvani singers I met in the summer of 1993 in anticipation of a paper I presented at the Wisconsin Annual Conference on South Asian (1993) on a double panel titled "Nala and Damayanti: Varying Visions of Love and Self." This essay is a revised, expanded version of that paper, also published as a chapter in my book *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India* (Cornell University Press, 1996).
3. I made numerous efforts to meet Tijan Bai over the years during which I conducted fieldwork in Chhattisgarh, but she was always "out-of-station" when I was in Raipur. She was often referred to as the Pandvani singer whom I should meet and record; my standard answer became that I would need to go to Delhi or France to hear her—an answer that delighted and amused her referees. Most of them themselves had heard her only over the radio or on cassette tapes, never in live performance.
4. Words in single quotations indicate English words that were used in otherwise Chhattisgarhi or Hindi conversations.
5. The shastric/Chhattisgarhi distinction in this context is equivalent to the *mārga*/*deśi* distinction referred to by Blackburn and Ramanujan as "(roughly 'country'/'highway') [the] contrast often cited by scholars (but rarely used by the folk themselves) as an indigenous Indian

expression of a folk/classical contrast. In fact, these terms represent only different (the local and pan-Indian) expressions of the same tradition, not different traditions" (1986:14).

6. Mani Ram sang an abbreviated version of the story the morning after the video showing. The performance was only an hour long and disappointingly perfunctory, since he remembered having sung it for me over ten years before and could not understand why I had asked for this particular narrative again. I told him that the tape had gotten old.
7. These include ankle bracelets, a silver waist-belt, bracelets, a fine chain in the part of her hair, a beautiful sari and blouse, red dye (*mahūr*) on her feet, and henna on her hands.
8. Nal and Damayanti was not part of the recorded repertoire on radio or television of either Ritu Varma or Tijan Bai (as of summer 1993). In the cassette-tape stores of Raipur's bazaars, I was able to locate two cassette tape recordings of Tijan Bai and one of Ritu Varma, titled, respectively, *subhadrā haraṇ*, *abhimanyu vadh*, and *kuntī aur gandhārī dvārā śiv pūjā*.
9. He did not provide the Yudhishtar frame story, which the singer mentioned earlier had told me was crucial to its performance.
10. "Siya Ram, Lakhan" is a variant of "Sita Ram, Lakshman" the names of the hero, heroine, and Ram's brother, of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
11. In Chhattisgarhi women's *Rāmāyaṇ maṇḍalī* performances of the episode of Sita's wedding, the narrative is feminized by the elaboration of the wedding scene, the bride taking leave of her maternal home, and the singing of wedding songs; but the songs are not drawn from the Chhattisgarhi repertoire, for Sita is not a Chhattisgarhi bride, not "one of us."

Raja Nal's *Purāṇa* and the Jat Kingdoms of Braj

Susan S. Wadley

Dholā, also known as Nal's Purāṇa (*Nal Purāṇa*),[1] is an oral epic widely performed by rural, often illiterate, males in the Braj region of western Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) and eastern Rajasthan, particularly popular amongst the middle and lower castes. When I sought *Ḍholā*[2] singers in the winter of 1994, I was told to go to Jat villages and ask for *jātiya chamārs*, i.e., members of the traditional leatherworking caste who were at one time the hereditary servants of Jat landlords.[3] It was this insight plus the political dominance of Jats in the Braj region beginning in the seventeenth century that led me to reflect on the epic content in connection with the social groups that sing and patronize it. In particular, I found the connection between the unkingly hero, Raja Nal, and the social status of the Jat farmers-turned-rulers intriguing. This paper is the result: a piece of conjectural history that ties the growth and popularity of this modern oral epic to the social circumstances present at the time of its purported creation.

Epics, perhaps especially in India but elsewhere as well, are thought to help shape a community's identity. This is seen in the common claim that an epic is "our story," as indeed *Ḍholā* is said to be "our great poetry" (*mahākāvya*) or "our *Mahābhārata*" in the areas where it is sung today. Oral epics differ from other genres of oral tradition in two crucial ways: (1) they have a wider geographic range, sometimes being shared by communities separated by

hundreds of miles and hence can represent regional identity; and (2) due to their complex nature, they can be more inclusive of the social groups within a community than are genres of song or story. Moreover, the same narrative storyline may become an epic in one region but not in another: as we shall see, parts of *Ḍholā* are thought even today to be a ballad or love song in western Rajasthan, while in the eastern district of Bharatpur, it is an epic that is keyed to issues of identity for its performers and audiences. (See Blackburn et. al. 1989 for additional ramifications of issues of epic and community.)

Oral epics are sung by poet singers; and while each of these individual singers may sing "texts" that differ from those of his peers (depending on the epic tradition and the extent to which it is attached to ritual and a "correct" version is mandated), the poet singers also represent their communities and issues present within them. By calling oral epics "folklore," we acknowledge the influence of the community, the folk, and their shared understandings of how the world works, the lore. Hence while an oral epic, as a piece of folklore, is individually created, it is also at some level anonymous and this very anonymity makes it safe for the teller, who is after all only telling a "traditional" tale, to speak out against injustice and to raise issues that might otherwise be unspeakable. As a story or song or epic that belongs to the community, that is, it is shared knowledge, the teller or singer does not have to accept full (or much) responsibility for the content. But it does allow him/her to speak out against superiors (as women do in their songs, see e.g. Raheja and Gold 1994), cultural rules that create conflict (as in a story that I collected of a woman who must feed her husband's sister because the latter had a right to protection at her brother's house), the breaking of cultural rules (as in the stories given by Kirin Narayan [1989] of gurus who do indeed indulge in sex), and the pain of particular kinds of choices (as in King Gopi Chand's taking the role of a *sannyāsī*, see Gold 1993). Hence groups (the folk) need these group constructions (the lore) not merely for voicing issues of identity, of belonging to a group, but also for the anonymity that allows them to voice issues that must otherwise be left unsaid.

The Epic *Ḍholā*

My starting point is *Ḍholā*, a primarily oral epic tradition performed in the villages of western U.P. and eastern Rajasthan (from Mainpuri west to Bharatpur and from Agra north to Meerut and Bijnor) and found also in numerous printed pamphlets from presses located in such places as Meerut, Hathras, Mathura, and Mainpuri. Through the 1990s, it remained popular with rural male audiences who were as likely to hear it on commercial tape cassettes as in an oral performance. It portrays a world of many castes, of goddesses and powerful women, of kings and yogis, as well as of husbands and wives who quarrel and complex father-son and familial relations. Most important for my purposes here, it presents a bumbling king who constantly seeks to have his status recognized and his authority accepted.

The opening lines as sung by a leatherworker in a village in Haryana capture the spirit of this oral epic:

O, mother of the mountains!
To see that mother, I'll go barefoot,
Though the blind can see nothing.
Mother, bless me,
Here I sit telling the story of Nal,...
Mother, I need your blessing,
As I am telling of brave men and their time.
Mangtu Lal, blind leatherworker singer, 1994

In these lines, Mangtu Lal captures the history of the epic as understood by local scholars in Mathura.[4] They assert that "*Ḍholā*" came into being over two hundred years ago when one Madarilal of the village Lohvan near Mathura (near the center of the Braj cultural region) asked the Devi of Nagarkot for the boon of writing something which would make his name "immortal." After hearing the Rajasthani *Ḍholā-mārū*, Madarilal wrote 360 stanzas of *Ḍholā* that he sang with *cikārā* and *ḍholak*. His disciples, Garhpati and Patbhal, made it popular throughout the Braj region (Sharma 1992).

Certainly *Ḍholā* was well-known in the latter part of the nineteenth century: the singers with whom I have worked were in

their sixties in the early 1990s and had learned the epic fifty years earlier from gurus who must have learned it fifty to sixty years before that. These men represent a tradition of oral teaching for few are or were literate. *Ḍholā*, referring here to this oral epic tradition, does, however, exist in a multitude of written traditions, with two important versions—one by Gajadhar of Hathras District (Gajadhar was still alive in the early 1990s and thought to be over 80 years old), and the other by Matol Singh of Bharatpur, who died about 1993 aged 62. Deep Chand Booksellers of Hathras, who published both the versions, informed me in 1992 that Gajadhar's version was being replaced by Matol's because Gajadhar's was to be sung to the *cikāṛā*, while Matol's version was to be accompanied by the harmonium. This difference is crucial to the performance style of the epic.

In its most "traditional" form,[5] *Ḍholā* is sung to the accompaniment of a *cikāṛā*, a two stringed bowed instrument (similar to a rabat), as well as a drum (*ḍholak*) and cymbals (*manjīrā*) or steel tongs (*cimṭā*). The singer, using only the *ḍholā* melody (a distinct melody easily recognizable to the rural U.P. audiences), would ideally mimic the sound of the *cikāṛā*, so that the voice quality of a singer singing in the style of Madarilal will be very nasal and "twangy." Over time, and probably in reaction to the development of *svāng*, *nauṭanki* and, less directly, Parsi theatrical styles, *Ḍholā* developed a more narrative style, becoming a string of songs linked by narrative, with not all songs sung to the *ḍholā* melody. Critically, the *cikāṛā*, with its limited melodic strings, had a condensed melodic repertoire so that the tunes used are very limited in their melodic range. Shifting the accompanying instrument to the harmonium allowed the singer greater melodic range and hence the possibility of incorporating a wider range of more complex tunes into his performance, facilitating a second layer of symbolic meaning based on melody to his performance.

Folk genres in this region are melody-specific, that is, each genre has many texts (usually about a specific topic, e.g., *varṇī*, about marriage of a bride) all sung to one or only a few melodies. Hence it is possible for a singer to convey a mood or attitude through his choice of a folk-song melody which emotionally connects the

audience with the original genre and its texts, even if the melody is used for a different or only vaguely related topic in the epic performance. (See also Wadley 1989.) For example, at one point the hero Raja Nal starts off to war with his army. Instead of singing this section in the *ḍholā* melody, the singer purposely chooses to perform it to the *alhā* melody associated with the more martial epic *Ālhā*, connecting it to both martial themes and emphasizing the march of the army with its strict four-four cadence. Initially, these melodies were drawn from the folk song repertoire of the region (e.g., *ālhā*, *varṇā*, *malhār*), though the *ḍholā* melody would still dominate. In a further innovation, the most recent renditions, especially those on commercial tape cassettes, are very self-conscious about the use of the *ḍholā* melody and include film tunes along with local folk melodies and the *ḍholā* melody. But these film tunes perform an evocative function similar to the use of the folk melody in that they too are known by the audience to be connected to specific topics and emotions.

Ḍholā, unlike most Indian oral epics, is not connected to a particular ritual or festival event, although some singers believe that the fall ritual of Deothan, when sugarcane is brought into the house to be worshipped, is tied to Raja Nal's bringing of sugarcane for his son's marriage. But *Ḍholā* can be sung at any time that a patron is willing to act as a sponsor. I first heard it on a rainy monsoon day in July 1968, when I was conducting doctoral research in the village known as Karimpur in Mainpuri District, about 150 miles southeast of Delhi. Knowing of my interest in folk songs, I was called that day to the village dharamsala where Ram Swarup Dhimar (Watercarrier) was singing *Ḍholā*. At that time in his forties, Ram Swarup worked as both a farmer and the leader of a renowned *Ḍholā* troupe that performed in a costumed folk opera style at local fairs and other functions. But on that rainy afternoon in his own village, he performed for the men forced out of their fields by the rains in the "traditional" style, playing the *cikārā* and accompanied by *ḍholak* and *cimṭā* players. I later saw his troupe perform on the verandah of the house next to where I lived, but the audio tape of that performance is unusable. By the time I turned my attention more

fully to *Ḍholā*, his troupe was disbanded. But he continues to perform as a solo singer whenever a patron (including the Western anthropologist) calls him.[6]

Ram Swarup can tell the full *Ḍholā* story, but he seldom sings all the episodes as only a half dozen or so are popular with his rural audiences. (It is this same set of six to seven episodes that one most commonly finds in commercial cassettes.) If he were to sing the whole epic, it would take some thirty nights, with 18–30 episodes each taking three to six hours to sing.

Despite its possible "composition" some 200–300 years ago, *Ḍholā* represents a complex weaving of classic Indian stories and oral and written traditions. Parts of it are known from the *Mahābhārata* in its Sanskrit rendition; other sections are known from fifteenth century Rajasthani Jain ballads, while some pieces were clearly popular in oral traditions over a long time period. Two-thirds of the modern oral *Ḍholā* exist as long Braj poems, with several long illustrated printed versions dating to the late 1800s (Prasād 1890; Todarmal 1879; Varma 1883). Related oral versions are found in Chattisgarh (Grierson 1890), most likely moving there with the eastern movement of those who claimed to be Rajputs and their retinues. In order to uncover some of this history, let me first tell a highly condensed version of the story and then relate each section to oral and literary traditions. In its fullest, most elaborated version, there are three rather distinct storylines/sections, each with different historical origins and connections to other textual traditions.

The *Ḍholā* Story

Section I: Nal's Birth and First Marriage

The first section tells the history of Raja Pratham of Narvargarh[7] and his wife Rani Manjha. Pratham is childless, despite 101 queens, which causes even his sweeper woman to turn away at the sight of him. After many sacrifices, a guru rewards Pratham for his devotion with one grain of rice that will give him an heir. Scraping the bottom of the pot in which rice is cooked, Manjha gets the rice kernel.

Because his other hundred queens are incensed at the pregnancy of Rani Manjha, they bribe a Brahmin priest to use his astrological charts to convince Raja Pratham to have her killed. But the sweeper called to kill her leaves her naked in the forest, where Nal is born with the help of the goddess Durga and the sage Narad who act as midwives. A passing merchant hears the baby crying and, adopting Manjha as his daughter, takes the two to his home. Nal grows to adulthood in the merchant's home, unaware of his true origin. He excels in school as well as in sports: at his sacred thread ceremony, his biological father, Raja Pratham attends, unaware that the merchant's grandson is his own son. Later, Nal meets and saves his father (Raja Pratham) from the jaws of a lion when hunting in the forbidden forest of Shantiban. Then, to aid his uncles who must find a missing cowrie shell that will save his grandfather's life, he travels to a faraway island where he meets and marries Motini, raised as the daughter of a demon but in reality an *apsara* from Indra's heavenly kingdom. Before Nal can marry Motini, they must kill the demon father who seeks the human in his house: this requires finding and wringing the neck of the demon's life index (a bird) locked inside seven rooms guarded by various ferocious beings. Durga and Kali, respectively, serve as bride's kin and groom's kin at their wedding. Nal and Motini then return to the seashore to meet the ship owned by Nal's merchant uncles. These two immediately desire the beautiful Motini and throw Nal overboard where he descends to Patal Lok, the kingdom of Basukdev (Vasuki, King of Snakes). There he becomes Basuk's "dharam brother." Meanwhile, Basuk's daughter falls in love with Nal, but he says he cannot marry her as she is the daughter of a snake and he already has one non-human wife. She vows to take birth as a human and marry him in her next life. She also presents him with a flower which, when he smells it, can make him look old instead of young. Nal eventually returns to the shore where a magical horse obtained from Motini's demon father awaits him.

Motini is carried by the wicked uncles back to the merchant's house. She reminds them that they are her uncles and rejects them, only to be taken to Raja Pratham who himself desires her. In

Pratham's court, Motini says that she will only consider becoming his wife after she has heard the Nal *kathā*, the story of Nal. In spite of searching far and wide, no one can be found who can tell the *Nal kathā*. Then an old pandit arrives in court (Nal in disguise, using the snake daughter's magical flower). He tells his own story, and both father (Raja Pratham) and son (Raja Nal) realize Nal's identity (for up until now, Nal has been adamant that he is a merchant's son). The family is reunited, but Manjha refuses to go to Narvar until she has bathed in the river Ganga, having lived so many years in a trader's house.

Raja Pratham and his wife Manjha proceed to the Ganga where they fight with Phul Singh Panjabi about who should bathe first. Pratham's army is turned to stone and Pratham and Manjha are taken prisoners, Pratham to press oil seed and Manjha to guard the roof against crows. Motini and Nal, with the help of Nal's friend Mansukh Gujar, go to rescue them. Disguising themselves as acrobats, they enter Phul Singh's court and eventually release Pratham and Manjha, although Motini must first battle against the magic of Phul Singh's daughter. Feeling shamed at his loss of honor, Pratham seeks his death in the river Ganga and Manjha commits *sati*, but only after Nal fights one more battle to get sandalwood for her pyre.

Section II: Nal and Dumenti (Damayanti)

Here Nal meets and marries Dumenti whose father Bhim Singh wishes to have Indra as a son-in-law. But Dumenti, in reality the incarnation of the daughter of Raja Basuk, has taken birth as a human in order to win Nal's hand. When Nal leaves to marry a second time, Motini ascends to heaven, from where she can continue to help Nal in his many troubles. At Dumenti's *svayamvara*, she chooses Nal rather than the god Indra. Angered that the human Nal has won Dumenti, Indra uses the help of the god Shanidev to bring misfortune to Nal's kingdom. Banished, Nal and Dumenti seek help from various sources in their distress: they go to her sister's where a hook on a wall swallows a necklace worth nine lakhs; they ask a

milkmaid for milk and cause her son to die when she leaves him in their care (he is given life after they depart); they go to Mansukh Gujar's and have their food spoiled by snakes; and eventually they part in the forest after the fish they catch dive back into the lake and the birds fly from the fire. Dumenti makes her way back to her father's kingdom. Meanwhile, Nal is bitten by a snake which gives him leprosy and he eventually obtains work as a keeper of horses for a king. Dumenti seeks her missing husband and holds a second *svayamvara* that Nal attends as the horseman for his patron. Given his ability to cook without fire and to light the lamps in the town, Dumenti recognizes her husband despite his body blackened by leprosy and they are reunited.

But Nal refuses to bring his ill-fortune back to Narvar, so the reunited couple return to the forest. This time they find work in an oil press (where Shanidev, who has brought them their troubles, cannot enter as his powers are negated by oil seed). Given Nal's powers, the oil presser, Raghu, quickly becomes one of the richest men in his kingdom which is ruled by Budh Singh. Nal teaches Raghu (renamed Raghunanadan, given his increased stature) to defeat Budh Singh at dice. Meanwhile, Nal defeats Budh's guards at the tank called Bhamartal. Called to court, he bets the product of his wife's womb against Budh's impending child. Nal has a son Dhola who is to be married to Maru, Budh's newly-born daughter. But before that can happen, Nal must prove his rightful status as a king several more times, first by feats of skill and then by obtaining sugarcane after defeating the demons in the forest of Lakhiyaban. Then Nal, Dumenti and their newly-born (and married) son Dhola return to Narvar.[8]

Section III: *Ḍholā-mārū*

The third section is the story of Dhola and his child-wife Maru. Married while infants, Dhola and Maru are separated when Dhola's parents return to Narvar. Meanwhile, Maru is cursed: any man who seeks to be her groom will be killed by the gate of her father's fort falling on him. On learning of this curse, Nal and Dumenti do not

tell Dhola of his child-bride. Later he meets Rewa, the daughter of a gardener, who entices him into a second marriage. Kept partially drugged by his parents and Rewa, Dhola is happy with her. But as Maru grows up, she wonders about her husband and eventually finds a way to send a letter to him. Rewa finds the letter and thwarts Maru's efforts at union with her husband. Finally, Dhola learns of his first wife and escapes Narvar on the back of a flying camel. Various troubles befall him on the way, but he eventually reaches Maru. There he must first defeat the demons in Lakhiyaban (who are delighted to meet the son of Nal) and kill a man-eating tiger. He also escapes death at the gateway and is reunited with Maru. They return to Narvar where Rewa's jealousy puts more barriers in their way. Finally, Nal and Dhola enter the pond, Maghotal, and end the lineage of Pratham. Thus ends the story of *Ḍholā*.

A Brief Literary History

Building on pieces of oral tradition and uniting scraps of story, the creators of *Ḍholā* have, over the years, woven together a story that has enormous internal coherence, although its sources are obscure. The story of Pratham and Manjha and Nal's early years and marriage to Motini appears to have no connections to earlier written works, nor have I found clear connections to other folk stories. Nevertheless, various motifs do have deep resonance in Indian cultural traditions, including the use of a life index to kill a demon, the childless king who wins a child through his many sacrifices as well as the telling of one's own story to learn one's true identity as well as reveal it to the father (as do Lav and Kush in the *Rāmāyaṇa*). So while this portion of the story builds on various pieces of cultural knowledge, it apparently is unique as a compilation.

The second section, drawing on the story of Nala and Damayanti from the *Mahābhārata*, is one of the most famous and best-known of India's stories, appearing in a variety of renditions over a long period of time. Extremely adaptable, in part because of its "separateness" as a story even in the *Mahābhārata* where it is known as the *Nalopākhyāna*, it has been used as a Jain didactic story (Bender

1951; also Kelting and Granoff this volume), as a Sanskrit love poem (the *Naiṣadhacarita* by Śrīharṣa), as the basis for Pahari minature drawings (Goswamy 1975), as a Braj poem (Todarmal 1879; Wadley 1999), as a dance-drama in the *kathakali* and *yakshagana* traditions (see Freeman, this volume), as a Tamil folk tale (Zvelebil 1987), and much more. There are, nevertheless, many differences between any one of these variants and the one most common to *Ḍholā*, including the absence of the fatal dice game and the role of Shanidev as the helpmate of Indra in his battle with Nal. The latter portion, that of the oil presser, has no written vernacular versions that I have yet found, but is common in oral traditions, where the episode of the oil presser might be variously attributed to Nal as here, to Harischand (Stokes 1880), to Vikramaditya (Wadley 1978), or to no named king (Narayan 1997). Here, however, the ending is different, as Nal is connected to *Ḍholā* and thus to early Hindi and Jain writings.

The third section is closely related to the Jain ballad *Ḍholā-mārū* studied by Charlotte Vaudeville (1962) and Richard Williams (1976) and found today in Amar Chitra Katha comic books. The Jain ballad, called by McGregor (1984) one of the first instances of extant Hindi literary works, dates to the sixteenth century when it was allegedly composed and written by a Jain poet, Kusalalabh, who notes that Dhola's father's name was Nal and alludes to the *Mahābhārata* story (Williams 1976). Extremely popular in western Rajasthan and Gujarat, it continued to be written and illustrated over the coming centuries. Many later versions of the Rajasthani *Ḍholā-mārū*, including beautifully illustrated manuscripts, exist in collections in Rajasthan. Composed in medieval Rajasthani dialects, these ballads are still sung by Manganiyar musicans in the western desert regions.[9] Other versions of *Ḍholā-mārū* were and are performed by *khyāl* (folk opera) troupes throughout Rajasthan since at least the early nineteenth century and some *khyāl* scripts are also found in manuscript form. The Rajasthani ballad is considered part of the medieval *lok khandakāvya* literature which builds on popular idioms and vernacular lyrics (Williams 1976:104). The *khandakāvya* literature was a verse-bound story, generally of one or several meters

with interspersed folk songs, a style not unlike the *Ḍholā* considered here. These Rajasthani written versions of *Ḍholā-mārū* can be seen as original compilations by authors of lyrics and verses familiar to them or newly created following known metrical and stylistic conventions. Almost surely oral versions of *Ḍholā-mārū* co-existed, as they do today.

Jat Kings and the Epic *Ḍholā*

Let me turn to the claimed history of *Ḍholā*. While on this topic, I would like to mention Parita Mukta's (1994) work on Mirabai, in which she suggests that attempts to historicize Mirabai through the linear narratives of positivist histories miss the immense importance of the Mira symbol and the meanings put on it. Some of what I am presenting here comes out of my understanding of *Ḍholā* and its implications as tied to the political histories of the region where it is most popular, but only loosely related to those histories in a concrete factual way. I offer then conjectural historical connections that make sense when *Ḍholā* is considered vis-à-vis its place in the wider scheme of religious ideas and performances of the area.

The history of *Ḍholā* becomes more interesting if we consider the political history of the time in which it was apparently consolidated. Apparently emerging in the late seventeenth century at the decline of Mughal rule, *Ḍholā's* popularity coincides with the rise to power in the Braj region of the Jat caste of agriculturists, who eventually ruled much of the area where *Ḍholā* was and is popular. The Mathura, Agra and Bharatpur region was heavily populated by Jat farmers, as well as by Gujars, a caste of herdsmen, and Ahirs, another group of farmers/herdsmen. The first Jat rebellion in the Braj region was in 1669 when a Jat zamindar named Gokul led a group against Abdun Navi, Aurangzeb's representative at Mathura, at a village six miles outside of Mathura. Though the Jats and their compatriots of Ahir and Gujar backgrounds were defeated, for almost a year they lay siege to the Mughal army, causing the loss of thousands of lives. Even in defeat, the blood "watered the newly sprouted seedling of liberty in the heart of the Jats" (Qanungo

1925:38). Although this initial Jat revolt may have been partially in response to Aurangzeb's religious intolerance (the explanation given by Qanungo and others), it is also probably due to the economic burdens caused by the continual shifting of tax collectors whose primary goals were to extract the maximum possible from their tenants, as well as to the over-centralized autocracy imposed by Aurangzeb. Jats are known to have an aversion to external interference and to pride themselves on their self-government: Aurangzeb's administrative policies ran against these values (Dwivedi 1989:19–34). But it is likely that Aurangzeb's religious intolerance may well have played a role, for Mathura in particular, having prospered under Akbar's patronage and the growing Vaishnava movements there in the 1500s, was especially hard hit, with a major temple destroyed and a mosque built in its stead.

By the late 1600s, the Mughal empire had begun to disintegrate under onslaughts from Marathas, Afghans, and Sikhs, amongst others. The Jat landlords of the area sought to fill the vacuum in the Bharatpur, Agra and Mathura region. Aurangzeb was preoccupied with troubles in the Deccan. So by 1685, the Jats began to organize under Rajaram, a local zamindar, and carried out looting raids against Mughal villages, convoys, and others. Aurangzeb's son appointed the Raja of Amber military commander of Mathura, with the task of subduing the upstart Jats, a task which melded with the Rajput Kacchwahas' desire to prevent the Jats from gaining independence on their eastern borders. The Mughal-Rajput alliance was only partially successful, despite Rajaram's death in 1688; and by 1700 the Jats, under the leadership of Churaman, had made the roads south of Delhi unsafe. Churaman was able to take advantage of the chaos after Aurangzeb's death and looted extensively, adding to his booty and becoming a more significant force. By 1713, the new Emperor, Shah Jahan II, received Churaman formally in Delhi.

The years following were tumultuous for the Braj Jats, with Churaman eventually being overthrown by an alliance of his nephew, Badan Singh, and the Mughals, supported by Sawai Jai Singh, now Raja of Amber. Badan Singh established the Jat headquarters at Dig, west of Mathura, which is considered by some to be one of the

most beautiful examples of Hindu-Mughal architecture, decorated with the spoils of the palaces of Delhi. Here, too, the Jats sought to create a court comparable to that of Delhi, installing poets and musicians to counter their reputations as "rustic farmers" (Entwistle 1987:195).[10] Badan Singh was never a feudatory of Sawai Jai Singh of Jaipur, but did accept his authority and went to Jaipur yearly at Dassehra to pay his respects. Eventually he was awarded the title of Raja, king, though he preferred the more modest "Thakur."

Badan Singh handed over rule to his (apparently) adopted nephew Suraj Mal, who is credited with building the impenetrable fort at Bharatpur. Suraj Mal successfully united the Jats and headed a rather stable regime in the area south of Delhi in a time of increasing turmoil at the disintegrating Mughal center. Nevertheless, he also saw some 10,000 Jats massacred while defending Mathura and Vrindaban against the Afghan Abdali who destroyed the undefended cities on Holi, 1739. The Jats joined with the Marathas against the northerners, successfully defending Dig and recapturing Delhi. Suraj Mal was eventually killed in a battle with Najib-ud-daulah in 1763; and although his troops won, they were demoralized. At that time, the Jat rule extended over the present-day districts of Agra, Mathura, Bharatpur, Dholpur, Alwar, Gurgaon, Rohtak, Meerut, Bulandshahr, Aligarh, Hathras, Etah and Mainpuri. Unfortunately, Suraj Mal's sons fought amongst themselves and became known for their spendthrift, decadent ways. By 1777, they had only Bharatpur and a few surrounding areas left. In 1805, the British, having taken Agra and Dig, were defeated when unable to penetrate the walls at Bharatpur, losing more than three thousand men. The British ultimately took Bharatpur in 1827, ending formal Jat control of the region.[11]

These Jat kingdoms from the late 1600s through 1827 were the same locales where *Ḍholā* developed and continues to be most popular. If the Braj scholars are correct in thinking that the epic coalesced, or gained affirmation, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, then we are justified in seeking its roots in Jat rule. As I shall show, a major theme in the first two-thirds of *Ḍholā* is Raja Nal's attempt to gain acceptance as a king. And although the term Jat appears, to my knowledge, only once in a written version by Gajadhar (where

the troupes of Raja Nal are described as being of the Jat caste),[12] the epic's parallels with the history cited above are intriguing. Particularly important are Jat-Rajput identities and relationships.

Jats are known as a landowning caste of hardworking farmers: they are also said to be thrifty, industrious, quarrelsome and boorish (Crooke 1896a:40), with women who are notable for their outspokenness and heavy work loads, including work outside of the house. Jat women are often used as the antithesis of the quiet, subservient "ideal" Hindu wife, perhaps because they have generally worked in the fields and are seen by the elite, Indian and Western, as coarser than either the Brahmin or Rajput women. Bharatpur, the primary Jat kingdom, is described as "governed by a descendent of the landholders who raised themselves in rank and power during the confusion of the eighteenth century" (Supt. of Printing 1894:92). Entwistle comments on their origin more negatively:

> Although they [Jats] claim to be of Thakur[13] or Rajput origin, and thus belong to the noble martial (kshatriya) class, they were originally an agricultural tribe who looted and plundered their way to power as the Mughal empire disintegrated (Entwistle 1987:4).

A British administrator, writing in 1884, used even harsher words: Jats had "no more illustrious ancestors than the leaders of a band of thieves" (Thornhill 1884:29). Most critically, the Rajputs concurred: "the Rajputs continued to regard them with scorn as a degenerate race" (Entwistle 1987:195). But as their wealth and prestige grew, their status changed, so that Suraj Mal, who was said to often reside in Jaipur, was "treated with respect almost equal to that shown royal princes" (Sahai 1898:22).

William Crooke (1896), in his *Tribes and Castes of the North-western Provinces*, sees the Jats and Rajputs as "intimately connected," a closeness that perhaps contributes to their mutual dislike. He feels that the two groups might originate from a common heritage, though the Jats are also said to be "descended from Rajputs by women of inferior stocks" (Crooke 1896a:29). Others say that Jats are Rajputs who didn't keep the proper rules (of both religion and domestic life). Crooke cites Ibbetson, saying, "Jats and Rajputs seem 'to

consider each other... as natural enemies, and I have often been assured by Jats, though I do not believe it, that they would not dare to go into a Rajput village at night'" (Crooke 1896a:32). Certainly, Jats had enormous enmity toward their previous Rajput overlords who often treated them poorly at best.

The basis of the antagonism is not merely in words, but was encoded on the body of the Jat: Crooke reports that Rajputs, in the days of their ascendancy, would not allow Jats to cover their heads with a turban, wear any red clothes, wear a crown (*maur*) as a bridegroom, or permit a jewel in a woman's nose. He adds, "Even to this day, Rajputs will not allow inferior castes to wear red clothes or ample loin-cloths in their villages" (Crooke 1896a:33). In another mark of their inferior status, he claims that "their beards and moustaches are scanty" (1896a:29) and, whether or not true, this is a clear indictment of their true Rajput status.

But if Rajputs and Jats were natural enemies, Gujars[14] and Jats were not.[15] As we saw above, Gujars joined in the first Jat revolt against the Mughals. And in the epic itself, Mansukh, Raja Nal's closest ally and friend, is often identified as a Gujar. Gujars and Jats are said to be of the same social level and condition and are allowed to eat and drink together "without any scruple" (Crooke 1896b:442). Crooke cites two proverbs showing the alliances of Jats and Gujars: "The Jat, the Gujar, the Ahir, and Gola, are all four hail fellows well met" (1896b:442) and "Pipe, tobacco, courtesan, the Gujar and the Jat are all one like the rice of Jagannath's temple which all castes may eat together" (1896b:448). Given this evidence, it seems conceivable that Raja Nal is not a "true" Rajput but rather indeed could be a Jat, or some other group calling themselves "Thakur" and claiming the status of kings.

Rajputs put an emphasis on family name and honor, to pride of ancestry. The Rajasthani chronicler, James Tod, notes that a Rajput "worships his horse, his sword and the sun [a reference to the sun lineage from which many claim descent]" and delights in blood and the glories of warfare (Tod 1971b:81–82). At the same time, he "scorns to hold the plough" (Tod 1971b:113), unlike the agricultural Jats. Hence the Rajput ethic is one of preserving honor, protecting

women, and never avoiding necessary warfare. The Rajput is marked by his mustache and turban, his horse and his sword and his concern for family honor.

One final point on the probable connection of *Ḍholā* with Jat rule in Braj. Jats were known as worshippers of Mahadeva and Devi, as well as local deities. They generally were antagonistic to Brahmanical Hinduism. This religious orientation fits with the goddess orientation of *Ḍholā*, as well as the likely prominence of Jats among the many Braj pilgrims to Nagarkot. While we are told nothing about the caste status of the purported "first" singer of *Ḍholā*, Madarilal, the lack of caste attribution suggests that he was not high caste. Finally, one author writing on Jats commented that the "degradation of Jats" by upper caste Hindus did not lower their prestige in their own eyes: it is exactly this prestige that I assert that *Ḍholā* claims. It is an epic about the right of "non-kings" to be kings.

Raja Nal's Kingship

It is here that I turn to textual evidence: much of *Ḍholā* focuses on a bumbling king, constantly accused of unkingly behavior and ancestry, not accepted by the Rajputs of the 52 kingdoms until he defeats them in battle, although he ultimately wins his many battles because the goddess is on his side. The text of *Ḍholā* as performed by Ram Swarup Dhimar provides a multitude of examples of the problematics of Nal's kingship. It is this contestation of his right to rule, and the constant questioning of his Kshatriya identity that, I suggest, links this epic to the rise of Jat kingdoms in the Braj region.[16]

Raja Nal himself is often unsure about his identity for, as we saw above, he was born in a forest and raised by merchants (Banya by caste). Despite his phenomenal growth and abilities, he is first made aware of his true identity when he is searching for the cowrie shell that is needed to free his merchant father from Pratham's jail and meets Behmata, the goddess of fate, sitting at the seashore tying *jūrī* (pairs of ropes that unite couples). He asks her to make a marriage for him by tying a *jūrī*, and Behmata asks him who he is. He replies that he is a trader and lives in a house where coriander and tumeric

are sold. Behmata refuses to tie a *jūrī* for a Banya. But she then proceeds to tell Nal that his name was not Banvari (the one of the forest) but Nal; and that although she did not tie *jūrī* for tradesmen, she did for Kshatriyas and hence could do a *jūrī*, i.e., make a marriage, for him. Later, when Nal meets Motini in the fort of the demon, he refuses to play dice with her, saying that he was not a Kshatriya and hence didn't know how (dicing is a game of kings, not a game to be played safely or well by lower castes). But Motini, seeing the red in his eye (a sign of the fighting spirit of the Kshatriya) and realizing, though he does not, that he is a Kshatriya, convinces him to try anyway.

But it is two later episodes, those of the battle with Phul Singh Panjabi and the scenes leading up to Dhola's marriage with Maru, where Nal's Kshatriya status is most problematic, where his kingly behavior and identity are questioned. In the battle with Phul Singh, it is Nal's reluctance to be a warrior that leads to the challenges to his identity while in the scenes concerning Budh Singh's court and Dhola's pending marriage to Maru, it is clearly his right to claim status as an equal to the kings of the 52 forts that is disputed.

Let us first look at Nal's questionable behavior in the battle at the Ganga. When his parents go to bathe in the river and are captured by Phul Singh Panjabi, Nal does not believe Motini's dream of their capture and refuses to go to save them. Then a Brahmin who had seen the battle returns from the Ganga and reports that the army is turned to stone. Nal refuses to take any action, saying, "Rani, it is nothing. I shall not take a single step out of Narvar." Motini replies, insulting his lineage and questioning his identity:

"Husband, I did not think you so very weak,
Or perhaps your mother committed a sin,
Who knows who came from her womb in the forest,
Husband, you stay in the palace,
I will fight against the Panjabis."[17]

Later, Nal and Mansukh are blinded when they attempt to enter the battle ground at the Ganga, and Nal immediately gives up the fight:

Nal says, "Oh god,
The royal throne has gone,
I will no longer live in the palace,
A bad time has come,
Fate has opposed us from all sides.
How can we release my parents from prison? We have been made blind."

It is Mansukh who suggests that they call Motini to aid them in freeing Nal's parents, and Motini is already present in the army, in disguise. She comes quickly to their aid, lifting the magic that had made them blind. Once Motini gives them their sight, Nal once again shows his cowardliness, starting back to Narvar saying,

"It doesn't matter if my parents die... we have come here to free my parents, not to become blind. I do not have enough power to free my parents. If we are blinded again, all will be ruined. Let us return."

Finally, Motini convinces Nal that she can free his parents and the three (Nal, Mansukh and Motini) enter the area where earlier Nal had been blinded. Nal is thrilled with his sight and immediately says that he'll set fire to Kampilgarh, the fort of Phul Singh. Motini responds,

"My husband, great king. First you were ready to run for home, and now you are ready to set a fire. You have no power to free your parents. Now you do what I say."

Nal agrees, and she proceeds with the plan to make them all *naṭs*, acrobats, and are thus able to enter Kampilgarh undetected.

Although disguised as *naṭs* while in Kampilagarh, their identity is nevertheless is questioned and challenged on various grounds, giving us an indication of the factors that lead to identity in Indian culture. First, the two men are questioned because both have red eyes, a mark of a warrior and not a low caste. Second, despite their bald heads and loincloths, their right to the goods that they bring is questioned, as the poor should not have a magical horse, shawls of the finest wool, expensive necklaces, and a nose ring for Motini worth many lakhs. They claim that these were gifts from Raja Nal and are believed, at least by the king. Finally, there is food, always a mark of dominance and superiority in India. Phul Singh insists on

feeding the *naṭs*, as would be expected, but Nal claims that if he eats this food, he would never be able to defeat Phul Singh. Motini arranges it so that Mansukh and Nal fight over the food, leading those in Phul Singh's court to say that these acrobats are definitely not Nal, for although a Kshatriya could go without food, he would never fight over it. Phul Singh himself says to his Divan,

> "They are quarreling over each scrap of bread. Not only they, but their great grandfathers were jugglers. They have been jugglers for seven generations. If they were from a royal family, they could go without eating, but would they fight over every scrap of bread?"

Eventually, after finding his parents in jail, Nal is captured by Phul Singh's wife's sister, Chando, who has magic that can initially counter that of Motini. Her first act is to capture Nal, lock him in a cage as a parrot and then, in his human form, tie a kerchief around his neck which makes him lose his senses. In this state, he acts as her female servant, until freed by a Tamilian woman he meets at the well where he has gone to draw water (a woman's job). The Tamil woman finds him an oddity, dressed like a warrior, carrying a sword, but drawing water! When she removes the kerchief, he regains his memory, "'Where is my army? Where are my mother and father? And where is my queen?' Nal was angry, and suddenly tears flowed from his eyes." Except in situations of *bhakti*, devotion to the gods, it is highly inappropriate for a Hindu male to cry, especially a warrior. And Rajput heroes never cry.[18] The Tamilian gives Nal a magic potion to turn Chando into a mare; and Nal and Motini proceed to war once again against Phul Singh. This time his daughter Sarbati calls her guru, Paramkuti, from Bengal and the powerful yogi captures Motini. Mansukh and Nal again are bereft without Motini and the two "weep bitterly," unable themselves to win against Phul Singh. Then Nal calls upon the goddess Durga for help: as soon as the goddess hears Nal's call, she has her lion draped in green cloth, calls her devotees, her ghosts, and her army and comes to Nal's aid. Durga sends Nal off to Bengal dressed as a physician to free Motini from Paramkuti. They trick Paramkuti into teaching Motini the most powerful magic, and she frees herself and is able to defeat the Panjabi.

Throughout this episode, Nal acts in a manner inappropriate to a Kshatriya: he refuses to go to war, tries to run away from the battlefield, weeps and cries when he should be fighting a battle. This is behavior unbefitting the warrior that he claims to be; and in fact, he can win against Phul Singh only because of Motini and Durga. Nal's behavior is not that of the Rajput hero who delights in the blood of war and will lose home and livelihood in order to protect family honor. And in fact, if I am correct that this Braj version of *Ḍholā* is a metaphoric statement on Jat rule, the continual questioning of Nal's identity and warrior behavior throughout the first section of *Ḍholā* makes sense. Before he can claim to be equal to the "kings of the 52 forts,"[19] he must be able to win battles. He does, but only because of the women at his side: Motini and Durga win battles, Nal weeps, as might a low caste coward, on the sidelines.[20]

Yet win he does, and that eventually brings the epic to another critical point, gaining a wife for his yet-to-be-born son and proving his superiority, given the hypergamous marriages practiced by Rajputs, over his son's future in-laws. Also involved here are issues of what it means to be rich and poor, high and low. These issues are addressed in the later portion of the second part of the epic, in the episodes of the battles of Bhamartal and Lakhiyaban and the marriage of Raja Nal's son Dhola. Given the complexity of these pieces, I shall present evidence here from the scenes where Nal aids his oil presser patron in defeating Budh Singh at dice and winning the progeny of Budh's wife's womb for his about-to-be born son. Not only must Nal prove his status as a Kshatriya, but ultimately he must prove himself better than Budh and his compatriots in the "52 forts."

Nal and Dumenti are in the forest when the oil presser passes by, afraid to return home where his wife might beat him because he has not sold any oil that day. Nal begs a handful of oil for the pustulant sores caused by his leprosy and the oil presser initially refuses, afraid that his wife will notice the shortage of even a mere handful of oil and harangue him more than usual. But Nal prevails, promising that the oil presser will sell more than usual. In fact, the oil presser returns home that day with his pockets full of money and

his pot still full of oil, a feat which further enrages his wife who threatens to beat him with her rice pestle. Eventually, Nal and Dumenti arrive at the oil press where Nal loses the curse of Shanidev and, since he can press hundreds of pounds of oil in one night, quickly makes the oil presser rich. At some level, Nal and the oil presser share an identity in the following scenes, for Nal, as the oil presser's servant, is thought also to be an oil presser.

Meanwhile, Budh Singh calls all the 52 kings for a feast, and also invites Raghu, the oil presser, for he is as rich as any of them. Nal is not invited, and feels the insult personally. Nal reads the letter of invitation brought to the oil presser and sheds tears at his fate:

> Today my heart is breaking with troubles, my throne at Narvar is permanent and I have many thousands of camels and elephants. But nobody can? God has sent me wandering from place to place. I have neither flour nor fire... [Then the oil presser read the letter]: his eyes became red. Because he had the power of one who is newly rich, he could not control himself.

Nal cries when he thinks of his one-time wealth and the insult of an oil presser being invited to the king's feast, but he himself, a fellow king, left uninvited because he was poor. Later, he says that his lack of invitation was a "matter of caste," opening the possibility of the association of wealth with caste, not birthright. As we shall see in the excerpts below, there is a tension here between wealth and caste, an issue at the heart of change in rural India, as well as a point of contention for the Jat rulers, never accepted as equals by the Rajputs.

The oil presser goes to court where he is seated on a stool in the midst of the 52 kings, who sit (below him) on the floor. Apparently, the 52 kings do not know that the one so honored is an oil presser. When one of Budh Singh's relatives complains about the honor shown the oil presser, Budh replies, "Keep silent, you sister fucker.[21] This is Sethji [an honorific for a rich man]. Tell me, who has all the money? Tell me! If we proclaim that he is an oil presser, we shall lose all our honor." But the oil presser's identity is revealed when the dancing girls sing songs honoring those who gave them money (songs which name the giver) and the 52 kings leave, saying that they refuse to sell their honor.

Meanwhile, Nal takes the oil presser's bullocks to Bhamartal to water them. Angry at his treatment, he destroys the pond, making the bullocks stir up the mud and defecate in it. But the 900 guards awake and attack. Nal again weeps uncontrollably. But his courage returns as he remembers Durga and he then kills all but one of the 900 guards of Budh Singh, wraps a steel bar around the necks of the last two, and returns to the oil press. As the epic singer reminds us, "the brave are born to die in battle, while the timid one dies a thousand times. The brave one must fight and die in battle, caring not where his lifeless body falls."

When the one surviving guard tells Budh Singh about the battle at the pond, he and the 52 kings rush to the pond. No one can prise open the steel bar from around the necks of the two soldiers. The best wrestlers in the kingdom are called, but none can undo it. Eventually they seek out the servant of the oil presser, for he had bent it originally. The oil presser begs Nal to ask Budh Singh's pardon for destroying his army and pond, saying:

"Son, tie your hands together and put a piece of *dub* grass in your mouth [signs of begging pardon and humility] and ask for the king's pardon. Then you will get charity in the form of your life."

But these words pierce Nal's heart "like a bullet" and he responds,

"A dutiful son dies because of a word, but an undutiful son doesn't die even from a bullet... I am not a coward, I am a Chattri. I shall kill him [Budh Singh] before the full assembly."

The 52 kings laugh as Nal staggers to the pond, for he is weak from lack of food. Nal agrees to do as the oil presser asks, saying that he [Nal] is his servant, not the servant of the Thakurs. Then Nal faces a dilemma.

"If I open the [iron bar] with my hands, my head will bow to the kings of 52 countries. I should not bend my head to them because I am their enemy. Why should I bow my head before my foe?" So he decides to open it by kicking it with his foot... he kicks the bar and it breaks into eleven pieces.

Then the king chastises the oil presser for keeping such a brave strong man as his servant, to press seeds. The oil presser responds that he knew nothing of this baba who had fallen on hard times, did not know of his talents.

That night, sitting hungry in the oil press, Nal sings the *dīpak rāg* (the "lamp" melody), causing all the lamps in the city to light at midnight. The pandits tell Budh Singh that only Nal knows the *dīpak rāg*. So Budh Singh demands to see Raja Nal and sets up a test to uncover his identity. No one but Raja Nal could shoot an arrow that could kill a fish at 450 paces. All the kings attempt the task but fail, so that the messenger (*khojā*, a barber cum messenger who proclaimed the news like the town crier of medieval Europe) shouts that the earth is empty of brave men and that all are impotent.[22] This upsets Budh Singh and he says that it is proclaimed that they are impotent, then the honor of their kingdom would be destroyed and no one would marry their sons and daughters. But he still refuses to call the oil presser's servant because he had been insulted by him, so the messenger again announces that the kingdom is impotent. Eventually Nal is called and, with the help of Durga whose *langūr* (monkey helper) sits on his arrow, kills the fish at 450 paces. But the kings push Nal into a ditch and each claims that his arrow had killed the fish. So the messenger returns to the oil presser's house and tells him what happened. The oil presser becomes red with anger and declares, "I didn't come here to live as a slave, nor do I ask for land." He calls the other oil pressers to take their revenge on Budh and they leap on their horses without bothering to saddle them. Arriving at Phul Bagh, the oil presser jumps into the ditch and takes Nal in his arms, embracing him with love. Here Nal faces another dilemma.

> "The quarrel is with Thakurs. Friendship with small people [literally 'lower people'] and cheap weapons never helps at these times. These are oil pressers by caste. If I say that I have been injured, they will start a fight. The Thakurs all have swords and they will be killed immediately. They have no power. And then I would have to kill people of my own caste... My brothers will be killed: I must do justice to myself."

So he tells the oil presser that though he had been pushed into the ditch, he is unhurt.

Then Nal goes on to shoot his arrow from 750 paces, and have it return to him. The 52 kings want to cheat, but are tricked by Nal so they are unable to do so. He kills the fish at 750 paces and the shouting of "impotency" ends.

But Budh still wants revenge, believing that his kingdom has been taken over by oil pressers. He thinks of another trick to dishonor the oil presser and his servant. He invites Raghu to play dice with him, but the oil presser claims that he cannot play as he is a mere oil presser. Budh Singh persists. For three days, they play for no stakes. But on the fourth, Budh Singh suggests that they play for real. For the first three rounds, the oil presser, in his pride, bids more and more heavily, until he loses everything: his wealth, his 360 bullocks, his oil presses. Then Budh pushes him off the throne, saying, "Sister fucker, you can no longer sit on the throne. I was furious when you were sitting on the throne with me, you low caste man (*jāti kamīn*)." Budh Singh tells the oil presser that if he values his life, he must be gone by sunrise, otherwise he and his family will be killed.

So why had the oil presser lost the game? It is a fruit of his sins. And the oil presser comes out of the court weeping... He sought to smoke the water pipe, but instead of smoke got water (proverb)... Nal looks out and sees the oil presser coming toward the press. Nal wastes no words; he catches the wrist of the oil presser and then takes him in his arms. The king of Narwar talks with his master. And the oil presser weeps, his heart broken with sorrow. "Son, there is no life in the world anymore."

Raghu tells Nal that he has no work, that he should leave.

Nal is perplexed. He is very confused, and asks what the problem is.

The oil presser replies, "See the cleverness of the Thakur. He asked me to sit on the throne."

Nal replied, "I am a Thakur too. If we do not act in this way, then how will the power of a lord endure? And you're involved in a difficulty with a very powerful person."

Raghu then relates that he has lost everything and that they will all be killed if they don't leave by dawn. Nal responds,

"Sister fucker, wait a minute. First you gamble and now you are trying to runaway from here. Wait a bit."

The oil presser replies, "Son, as the rosy dawn spreads, we will be hung. There is no way that we can escape."

Nal answers, "I earned all this with hard work. Now you have lost it all gambling. Oh oil presser, you lost all our wealth in gambling and you dare to show your face to me. You should play one more time with friendly dice."

The oil presser responds, "But I do not have anything left except my life, my wife Ganga Telin, and my daughter. I have nothing left: how can I play now?"

Nal responds, "No, you have much wealth... enough to play with the king. Go and bet your Ganga Telin on the round. If you have wealth, the king will not play, but if you bid your Telin, he will quickly grab the cowrie shells and won't stop for any reason. But tell me, whose cowrie shells were you using?"

Nal then gives him the 16 cowrie shells of Motini and instructs him to say to himself, as he throws them, "If these are the true cowrie shells of Nal, [I should win]."

The oil presser then runs back to the king, and says,

"I am an oil presser and you are a Thakur. You have won my bullocks and my oil presses. You should also win my Telin. Your queen will not be able to do this oil pressing work. She is royalty. She will not be able to press oil. You should win my Ganga Telin so that she can do the oil pressing for you."[23]

Budh Singh agrees and invites the oil presser to play once again. As Budh Singh loses more and more, he becomes mad (literally, hot). He stakes his whole kingdom. But on that throw, the oil presser speaks the name of Nal aloud. Budh Singh grabs his wrist and snatches the cowrie shells away, saying he would return them only to their true owner. The oil presser returns to Nal and exclaims,

"The pumpkin doesn't fit in the mouth of a goat. Those who are poor don't have the knowledge to work and don't have the knowledge to keep their wealth. I said your name out loud and the king caught my wrist, asking me whose name I was calling."

To this, Dumenti interjects, "My husband, I have been telling you: friendship with the lower castes and blunt weapons are useless in times of trouble."

Finally, Nal himself goes to Budh Singh's court and they agree to a game, betting their unborn children. The one who loses must give

up a daughter, a clear sign of defeat in Rajput kingdoms. Nal defeats Budh, but before he can marry his son Dhola to Maru, he has to undergo one more test, that of fetching sugarcane for the wedding canopy from the forest known as Lakhiyaban and inhabited by demons. Budh still refuses to accept that Nal is his equal or his superior. Nal prevails, wins against the demons, and Dhola and Maru are married, though both Nal and Budh put up barriers to their actual meeting as adults, for anyone who seeks Maru's hand will be killed by the gate to the fort.

Throughout this episode, Nal's right to claim kingship, and his servitude to Raghu and his metonymic status as an oil presser, work against each other. To the Rajputs of the 52 kingdoms, he has no right to claim kingship. His several feats of prowess are continually disregarded, and Nal himself repeatedly questions whether he should be loyal to the "Thakurs" or the low castes with whom he associates. He also continues the pattern seen earlier of breaking into tears when faced with battle, only to "remember Durga" and, with her help, go on to prevail against the kings allied against him.

Through the figures of the oil presser and Nal, we learn of the intrigues against upstarts, against those who have the audacity to claim a status equal to that of the 52 kings. Through trickery and cheating, the Rajputs will attempt to destroy those who gain wealth and stand against them. And Nal is torn between justice to the "lower castes" and justice to his own people, the Thakurs. He doesn't hesitate to embrace Raghu nor to lie about his injuries to save Raghu's life. But he also claims the right of the ruling to lie to salvage their rule, to prevent those who seek to claim a throne from actually claiming it.

In discussing *Ālhā*, another epic of the region, one associated with the rulers of Kanauj, Karine Schomer (1989:150) lists the components of *rājpūtī*, Rajput honor. These are never turn back in time of war, never strike the first blow, never strike a woman, never achieve one's goals by stealth or treachery, never leave a wrong unavenged, do not fear omens, retain loyalty to those whose salt you've eaten, prize your reputation more than your life, always help a woman who asks. Nal's behavior is blatantly contrary to this ethic:

he is fearful of war, he demands to turn back, he would quite happily have left his parents in prison, he is shaken by bad omens, he applauds Budh Singh's treachery with the oil presser.

Ḍholā in the Land of Braj

Traditions are no longer understood as homogenous or unchanging, never questioning custom. Rather, we now understand them as continually responding to and reflective of their historical and socio-political situations. *Ḍholā* is no different: continually evolving, both in content and stylistics, it represents one picture of the diverse peasant communities in which it has been fostered by poet singers for the last several hundred years. As such, it portrays the politics of the Braj region in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when kings who weren't kings sought to be kings, and their friends and helpmates were not royalty, but the laborers and farmers who populated the mud-walled villages that became their "mud forts." The epic singers tell of two Raja Nals: the first is the bumbling king who cries and would rather not fight, but manages to win against his enemies with the help of his wives and the goddess. The second is the Raja Nal, through association a low caste man, who has the audacity to claim Rajput status and, who by countering his dislike of warring, manages to prove his right to that status and claim the Rajput's daughter for his son.

This continually changing oral epic is markedly different from the other performed epics of the region, particularly the two most popular, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Ālhā*. The *Rāmāyaṇa*, especially Tulsidas's *Rāmcaritmānas*, immortalizes the god-hero as perfect king—with his perfect wife—and is an epic peopled by sages and rulers. *Ālhā*, composed in the early years of Muslim rule, focuses on the wars between Muslim invaders and Hindu kings: it is an epic of magnificent battles. *Ḍholā*'s hero, Raja Nal, has few kingly attributes and requires the extraordinary powers of his first wife Motini to succeed in most ventures. Whereas the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Ālhā* barely mention members of social groups other than Brahmin and Kshatriya (or Muslim), *Ḍholā* portrays oil pressers, herders, sweepers,

acrobats, traders, and other social groups found in the villages where it is popular. *Ḍholā* also features, indeed exalts in, goddess worship, with male deities almost nonexistent. While male gods predominate in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Sarada Devi is significant in *Ālhā*, but notably she demands the blood of the battleground as part of her offerings (Schomer 1989:154). In *Ḍholā*, Durga demands no such thing, but responds instead to the devotion of her devotee by aiding him in his quest. Remember that *Ḍholā*'s locale is Braj, a region where devotional religion in the form of *bhaktī* is pervasive. That goddess worship here should take the form of devotion is no surprise.

It is my contention that it is precisely these qualities of inept kings, multi-caste communities, contentious wives and powerful, sometimes warring, goddesses that have made *Ḍholā* popular with its landed patrons and lower caste singers. Ram Swarup, the poet singer whose work is represented here, once told me that the *Rāmāyaṇa* is for Brahmins, while *Ḍholā* is for "Thakurs." *Ḍholā* is not the world of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, with its royal overtones and "women and shudras fit only for beating" (to paraphrase Tulsidas). Thus it is possible to perceive *Ḍholā* as a Bakhtinian parody of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and other traditions that exalt in the perfect king. *Ḍholā* is about the travails of a much more human king who finds ruling problematic and warring unpleasant. As Barbara Myerhoff (1992) noted in her classic work on the Jewish survivors of the holocaust, cultures include self-representations to their members, and whether it be truth or lies, self-knowledge for the group is an important result of cultural stories. Without representing ourselves in our stories, our very existence is questioned. Popular performances are a particularly effective way of constructing identity, for here images of community, authority and self are articulated in clearer, more precise ways than they are in everyday life.

Gramsci (1985:190) contends that the morality of the people has imperatives that are "much more tenacious and more effective than those of 'official' morality." These issues of morality often emerge in cultural traditions such as *Ḍholā*. In his discussion of the ways in which the ruled counter the ruling, James Scott discusses the hidden transcripts of the powerless (Scott 1990). *Ḍholā*, while

not hidden as an epic, does contain a subversive message: Nal is a very human king with human foibles; he is not driven by the ethic of the Rajput, in fact he blatantly opposes it. Furthermore, he is torn by his loyalty to those not born kings. As such, *Ḍholā* is a public transcript with subversive messages. Hence it becomes a potent form of expression for lower class rural males and their landed patrons, for it is precisely these groups whose story is told here and who face the same problematics of quarreling wives, of the contradictions of birthright and achievement, of questioning the meaning of caste, and of devotion to the goddess.

Notes

1. Epic narrative poetry is often named *purāṇa* by its local authors. By the 1500s, both the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa* were in local vernaculars and folk poets were familiar with this kind of literature. Thus the *purāṇa* style combined with local ballads, sometimes producing new genres of literature, as in the Bengali *maṅgala*, auspicious ballads, or sometimes producing a new tradition, possibly later renamed a *purāṇa*, as in the case of Ḍholā. See Goudriaan and Gupta 1981:191.
2. I use *Ḍholā* for the epic, Dhola for the son of Raja Nal, and *ḍholā* for the melody associated with this epic.
3. *Jātiya chamār* is one of the largest subcastes of *chamār*s in Uttar Pradesh, especially prevalent in the Meerut-Agra region, as well as Badaun. They are field laborers, cultivators, dealers in hides. Before the breakdown of the *jajmāni* system, they were often hereditary servants of Jat landlords, giving one possible derivation of their name (Briggs 1920:23).
4. In particular, Ram Narayan Agrawal of the Braj Kala Kendra and Satyaprakash Sharma (1992).
5. I find it especially difficult to use the word traditional here, for this is an epic that appears to have been constantly changing, both in text and in performance style. But there is clearly an "older" way to sing it as compared to a "newer" way, and for that older way, I uncomfortably use "traditional."
6. Since this time, I have worked with five other *Ḍholā* performing groups, have some 150 hours of audio and video tape of performances and

have collected several dozen printed pamphlets of versions of *Ḍholā* as well as more than 75 commercial tape cassettes of the epic. Unless otherwise noted, I will be using primarily the oral performances of Ram Swarup for the analysis here. In 2005, Ram Swarup continued to sing, though rarely and mostly for patrons from the lowest castes. His former Brahmin patrons no longer called him.

7. There is a small Rajput kingdom called Narwar (Narvar) near Gwalior in what is now Madhya Pradesh that is said by some, including Tod, to be the place from which Nal, as in the Nala-Dumenti, story comes from, and also the Amber Kacchawa lineage (Tod 1971a:282). Later scholars, especially Qanungo, dispute this assertion, saying that Tod fabricated the connection (Qanungo 1960) using inappropriate evidence. Ganguli reports that Rajput bards claim Dhola as the son of the Kacchwas who ruled in Narvar, but these are likely to be the same "bards" that sing the epic considered here (Ganguli 1983:55). I have found no evidence that there is a consistent link between the Nala-Dumenti story and the *Ḍholā* story west of Bharatpur, aside from the naming of Dhola's father as Nal in some versions of *Ḍholā-mārū*. Grierson (1890) does indicate, however, a more complicated Nal connection in the Chattisgarh version that he collected. As the Muslim historian Qanungo said, regarding the search for the factual history of the Rajasthani epic *Padmani*, "it is un-literary to run after the shadows of history in such stories" (Qanungo 1960:25). I can only hope that the historical connections that I am claiming here would not reap his condemnation.
8. Some of these individual battles and events take place at different points in the story depending on the singer. As best as I can tell, all the singers whom I have known would recognize this synopsis, but might argue about whether Nal or Dhola fought such and such a battle, or whether the necklace worth nine lākhs was stolen the first or second time Nal and Dumenti were banished.
9. I was able to tape such a performance at Rupayan Sansthan in Jodhpur with the gracious aid of Komal Kothari.
10. One of these court poets, Somnath, wrote the *Sujan vilas* containing a Braj rendition of the popular stories of King Bhoja. The oil presser story found in *Ḍholā* is sometimes associated with King Bhoja (Narayan 1997).
11. The preceding history of Jats is based on Entwistle 1987; Qanungo 1925; Dwivedi, 1989; and Spear 1951.

12. *Ḍholā* is also silent on the issue of Muslims. The battle for honor appears to be a Hindu one, not one to be validated by Muslim emperors.
13. A "true" Rajput would never define himself as a Thakur (Lindsey Harlan, personal communication), and this is a term assumed by the Jats as a mark of prestige.
14. He is sometimes also called a Maina (Meena), another low caste cum tribal group contending with the Rajputs for sovereignty in the region.
15. Ann Gold (personal communication) tells me that Rajputs were sometimes nursed by Gujar women and the Gujar and Rajput sons then formed a kinship-like alliance. But Nal meets Mansukh out hunting, not because they share a common wet-nurse, and Mansukh is clearly head of a comparable kingdom.
16. I deal with broader issues of Nal's identity and the necessity of his being "human" in my book, *Raja Nal and the Goddess: The North Indian Oral Epic* Ḍholā *in Performance* (2004).
17. This example comes from the episode sung by Ram Swarup Dhimar in Karimpur, Mainpuri District, U.P. in 1984. It is archived at both the Archive and Research Center for Ethnomusiciology (AIIS) in New Delhi and the Archive for Traditional Music, Indiana University: Wadley Collection, Tapes 302–304.
18. The point on *bhaktī* comes from Jishnu Shankar. When I queried Lindsey Harlan about whether Rajput heroes there ever cried, I received a one word answer, "Never!" A Tamil proverb says, "Don't trust a man who cries, and a woman who loves" (Vasudha Narayanan, personal communication).
19. The term 52 forts is common in folklore of the region, and refers to (possible mythical) Rajput kingdoms in the Kangra-Tehri Garhwal regions of the Himalayan foothills.
20. Many instances throughout the epic connect low castes and cowardliness.
21. Literally *sāle*, that is, wife's brother. Often the epic singer uses the more literal *bahen choud*, but here the implication is "sister fucker," though the insult is the same.
22. The word used here is *nirbīj*, literally "without progeny," used here as an insult, implying without power, impotent in every way.
23. There are implied sexual connotations here.

The Performative Context of Nala in Late Medieval Kerala

Rich Freeman

This essay engages three adaptations of the Nala-Damayantī narrative from Sanskrit into the language we today call Malayalam, through three different performance genres of late medieval Kerala. While all three works, composed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries CE, are today read as pieces of Malayalam literature, their genred nature as temple arts raises interesting issues in terms of how contextual features helped shape their received textual form. Contextual features are here understood to work at multiple levels of interaction, some conditioning genres in their specific modes of performance, and some linking genres themselves to wider themes and frames of interpretation in the culture of late medieval Kerala.[1]

I have argued more generally for so-called literary genres from pre-modern Kerala that the contemporary analysis of these text-artifacts as though they were intended for the privately contemplative acts of silent reading, that we moderns associate with the print-form of "literature," largely ignores the originally recitational, sung, enacted and performative character of these compositions (Freeman 2003). Recognizing their performative nature, however, does not mean we can automatically ascribe to them the compositional fluidity or narrative improvisation we usually associate with "folk" forms. In the case of these highly learned arts, we shall see how the context itself was heavily conditioned by textual regimes, and how the basic

storyline and characters remain relatively fixed around their originally Sanskritic models.

Despite the apparent conservatism in crafting these adaptations of Nala for Kerala venues, however, I have found that they contain innovative features of considerable significance in understanding the historical and social forces that motivated the adaptation and performance of this pan-Indic narrative in this particular region of south India. While some of these features emerge as specific to the Nala tale itself in Kerala, others are more pertinent to the whole regime of the temple arts in their generic and inter-generic linkages to the wider social context.

The findings of this essay thus concern several levels of the text-context interface at play in these works. Most generally, I argue that despite a basic textual fidelity to the Sanskritic renderings of Nala, specific features of the temple art genres gave this tale a purchase in the society it would not otherwise have had. At the level of the texts themselves this operates through seemingly secondary framings, insertions, and inter-textual linkages that work to situate these tellings with some social specificity. Of particular interest are textually depicted scenes that develop their reflexive potential to mirror and critique their own socio-political context of performance in Kerala. Finally, we encounter through such devices recurrent themes, especially those of social conflict, militancy, and their relation to enacted ritual events, which give us insight into the larger meaning such performative texts held for their authors and audiences in the region.

The Context of Caste and Temple

To begin grounding these issues locally, we first need to understand something of the institutional and social framework in which these literary genres were produced.[2] Since all three genres that concern us here were basically commissioned and performed as "temple arts," it is important to understand how the religious ideology of caste segregation that was basic to the constitution of this society converged with literary and performative entitlement in the forum

of the high Hindu temple. In terms of basic social boundaries, only those non-polluting castes, those "with caste-grade" (*savarṇṇa*) were normally permitted entry into Kerala temples, and once inside, these castes were further graded through various ritual strictures and architecturally marked zones of approach to the deities' sanctums. These caste-grade Hindus were probably a demographic minority compared to all the laboring and productive castes, those "without caste-grade" (*avarṇṇa*), who were excluded from temples as polluting. The *savarṇṇa* castes, who certainly constituted the bulk of the literati, were divided into three main blocs: Brahmins, the "gods on earth" (*bhūsuranmār*) who directly ministered to deities in their sanctums; Ambalavāsis ("temple-dwellers") who assisted in, and provided most of the material needs and services for, the conduct of worship; and the broad taxon of Śūdras, consisting of most of those in political authority, their military retainers, and the common soldiery (classed generally together as Nāyar), along with several service castes at this bloc's lower margin.

While the small number of Brahmins and the only slightly more numerous Ambalavāsis were vastly outnumbered by the Śūdras, it was these former two groups who prominently controlled Sanskrit knowledge and who authored the Sanskrit-based cultural productions of the temple and of courtly society. While Brahmins had principal authority in Sanskrit scholarship (as an extension of their monopoly over the Vedas), Ambalavāsis were often equally learned, and had specific professional claim to perform their various roles in the rich array of Kerala's temple arts. These arts included the various dramatic, dance, and recitational genres that survive as high literature, and they were all most prominently staged on temple grounds and in the sacred theaters (*kūttambalams*) included in temple precincts. The Brahminical hold over this knowledge formation was further cemented by a sexual politics in which Brahmins had privileged connubial relations with women of the Ambalavāsi and Śūdra castes. The latter had no political or economic claims against their Brahmin genitors, but were considered enriched by the gains in knowledge and cultural capital of this sustained intimacy. It was this complex of temple arts and their eventual

extensions into the wider society that was critical to the growth of Malayalam literature as we currently understand it, and to the renditions of Nala's tale that concern us here.

The Context of Literary Language

Within this caste-stratified organization of social life, language and literature were themselves similarly structured as fields of cultural production. The language we now call Malayalam (Malayāḷam) emerged in its basically modern form in Kerala by the sixteenth century or so, after successive stages of Sanskritizing transformed the earlier western Tamil dialect of the land through various intermediate hybrid stages preserved in the literary and inscriptional record. While I have elsewhere discussed something of the actual cross-cutting caste-dialectal, linguistic, regional and literary stylistic complexities feeding this eventual amalgam, local scholarship has followed a fourteenth-century bifurcate classification of the earlier literary language into two distinct registers (Freeman 1998; 2002; 2003). The higher-caste literary language drew explicitly on the pan-Indic, cultural capital of Sanskrit, while the relatively lower-caste variety embraced local forms which were also avowedly "Dravidian" in their affiliation with regional, south Indian norms. The contrastive stance of these normative orientations was not merely linguistic or literary, but was indexical of the wider patterns of socio-cultural institutions with their caste-stratified schisms.[3]

The first register, called Maṇipravāḷam ("pearls and coral"), emerged perhaps in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries as an explicitly formulated attempt to fuse the local "Tamiḻ" (as the language of Kerala was still called into early modernity) with Sanskrit, in terms of vocabulary, poetics, phonology and, to some extent, grammar. Since this presupposed thorough learning in Sanskrit to craft the local language into a medium worthy of Sanskritically high poetry (*kāvya*), this was largely limited to Brahmins and those castes (mostly Ambalavāsis) who were socially and culturally closest to them. The other literary register or medium, called *Pāṭṭu* (literally, song), which emerged around the same time, reflected the literary conventions

of Tamil in terms of adhering to Dravidian poetic forms, metrical systems, and, in the earliest stage, even phonology. The preponderance of *Pāṭṭu* authors seem to have been of clean, Śūdra caste grade, and their works were nearly all adaptations of Sanskrit religious works, in contrast to the more thematically original, courtly, and frequently erotically oriented literature of early Maṇipravāḷam.

By the fifteenth century, just before the earliest of our Nala works appeared, the two styles of literature were converging to some extent. Brahminical authors were increasingly tending to leave their erotic, courtesan literature in favor of Epic and Puranic adaptations from Sanskrit originals, while the *Pāṭṭu* authors fully embraced Sanskrit phonology and vocabulary. Significant differences from the earlier literary styles remained, however. Most prominently, most Brahmin and Ambalavāsi authors continued to compose in Sanskrit meters and to follow models of high poetry (*kāvya*) from the Sanskrit, while lower-caste authors retained the markedly distinctive Dravidian meters and seemed more drawn to sentiments of heroism and devotion, rather than the courtly erotic themes of Maṇipravāḷam works.

The three genres of Malayalam literature in which the Nala narrative finds its most prominent representation can be clearly differentiated along this stylistic spectrum, though none of them fall out of the generally upper-caste domain of temple productions.[4] They were: the *campu*, a recitational (and possibly enacted) genre whose textual form was borrowed directly from the Sanskrit genre whose name it shares; *kathakaḷi*, the vernacular form of temple theater that combines sung Sanskrit verses with both Maṇipravāḷam and more colloquial uses of the local language for its dialogues; and *ōṭṭan tuḷḷal*, a lexically Sanskritized song-literature almost entirely in Dravidian meters, named for a dance-genre (*tuḷḷal*) performed on the occasion of temple festivals. As it happens, this sequence of Nala's appearance in these genres also represents the temporal sequence in which the genres themselves emerge in Malayalam literature, and charts a rough movement from more Brahminically Sanskritic to more popularly vernacular literary and performative styles.

The Context of *Campu* in Kerala: Regionalizing the Sanskrit Genre

The genre of *campu* (to use the Malayalam spelling) in which the first of our Nala versions appears has an interesting and complex relation to the same genre (spelled *campū*) in Sanskrit and to its adaptation for performance in Kerala. As far as Sanskrit is concerned, the *campū* was the last classical genre to appear in that language (Lienhard 1984:265–74). One of the earliest known Sanskrit *campūs* in India was in fact on the story of Nala, the *Naḷacampū*, by an author from Karnataka who composed it early in the tenth century (Warder 1988:599–610; 658–59). The signal novelty of the *campū* form was that it combined blocks of classically metrical verses with ornately crafted chunks of interspersed prose. While it has been argued that the form found favor with Sanskrit authors because they sought ever more intricate ways to display their punditry through combining the earlier metrics of the great poem (*mahākāvya*) with the novelties of prose (Lienhard 1984:267–68), the actual origins for the *campū* seem to lie in earlier works in the Prakrits and vernacular languages. *Campū*s seemed especially at home in the Dravidian language regions, where the three long narrative works of early Tamil took this form.[5] Literary scholars further recognize the special prominence of Kerala in *campu* composition, in both Sanskrit and Maṇipravāḷam, and the particular suitability of the form to the stage and the temple arts (Warder 1972:186–87; Warder 1988:658–59).

Of direct relevance to this poetry-prose form in Kerala is the tradition of staging Sanskrit dramas there called *kūṭiyāṭṭam*. This was the special province of a key Ambalavāsi caste, the Cākyārs, and they developed an ancillary tradition of the *Cākyār kūttu*, in which they interspersed the recitation of Sanskrit dramatic verses with prose glosses, expansions, and banter in simpler Sanskrit and in the local language (Raja 1964; Venu 1989). Similarly, during the staging of Sanskrit plays, which were extended over days in the temple theater (*kūttambalam*), the Nambyār caste of Ambalavāsi drummers presented recitational prose summaries in "Nambyār Tamiḻ" (a more colloquial Malayalam), presumably for the members

of the audience who did not know Sanskrit. While there is some debate among Malayalam scholars as to whether the explosion of Epic and Puranic *campus* was for *Cākyār kūttu*, or other recitational forms, such as *pāṭhakam*, no one disputes that these were written for performance on temple grounds, and that the very structural form of the genre lent itself to this function (Śarmma 1967: xiv-xxi).

In terms of the performative context of the Kerala *campu*, one of the most interesting aspects of this genre is that much of the Sanskritically adjudged "prose" (*gadya*)—so-called because not conforming to Sanskrit metrical schemes—is actually poetry in the local Dravidian meters such as we find in the *Pāṭṭu* literature (Śarmma 1967: xxii,ff.). These local meters relied, I am convinced, on the extrinsic rhythmic beat (*tāḷam*) of percussion time-keeping, which points to the embedded design-feature of live performance (again, in keeping with the meaning of *pāṭṭu* as "song"). The other interesting feature of this whole genre in Kerala, pointing again to the improvisational and performative nature of the art, is the fact that *campu* "authors" borrowed freely from other works, their own and others, in Sanskrit and Maṇipravāḷam, and incorporated these verses or prose stretches seamlessly into their own compositions, as authorially composite works.[6]

The *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu* and Maḷamaṅgalam

While there were certainly earlier Sanskrit, and perhaps, vernacular works on Nala from this region, the *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu*, marks the major entry of this story into the regional language of Kerala (Maḷamaṅgalam 1967 [1934]). It was composed by a Nambūtiri Brahmin, one Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri, son of a famous lineage-manor (*illam*) called Maḷamaṅgalam. Known to posterity simply by his house name, Maḷamaṅgalam, he composed a number of works both in Sanskrit and in the "vernacular" (*bhāṣa*), as his high Maṇipravāḷam is qualified in the title of his *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu*. He is estimated to have lived perhaps from 1525–1595 CE, straddling the reign of two successive kings of Cochin, in central Kerala, who eventually became his major patrons (Uḷḷūr 1954:293–95).

The *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu* is thought to be the earliest of four Maṇipravāḷam *campus* that Maḷamaṅgalam authored, and is in many ways the least characteristic of the genre (Uḷḷūr 1954:418–20). While Maṇipravāḷam is supposed to combine in a pleasurably balanced union (*yogam*) the local *bhāṣa* which we now call Malayalam with Sanskrit, most verses of his *Naiṣadha Campu* are heavily Sanskrit (some entirely so), sometimes using vocabulary that is difficult and obscure. This reflects the clear aesthetic intent of the work, as well, which is to recreate in "*bhāṣa*" the figures of sound and sense (*alaṅkāras*) of high Sanskrit literature. In keeping with this, the predominant aesthetic sentiment is given over to the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), for which the largely secular love-story of Nala and Damayantī was clearly chosen. (I will suggest later how this secular thematic was adapted in other genres to the religious context of the temple.) A modern commentary indeed shows, in as tortured a fashion as could be done for any high poem in Sanskrit itself, how Maḷamaṅgalam's lexicon and poetic figures mirror those of established Sanskrit *kāvyas* (Maḷamaṅgalam 1967 [1934]).

For example, the following verse, which the great, modern poet-critic Uḷḷūr said thrilled him more than any other verse he had read in the *campus* of "Malayalam" (*bhāṣa*), is actually entirely in Sanskrit:

> She thought to herself, each time she approached them, "I won't break the rapture they experience in imagining that they are united." And so, with the sympathy of a discerning friend, Sleep withdrew from their presence [1.23, p.80].[7]

To fully appreciate the compounding of imagery here, one must know that the absence of sleep is one of the ten symptoms of lovesickness that Sanskrit pandits have ennumerated and analyzed in their treatises of literary production and criticism. In this case, the torment of sleeplessness is ironically inverted into a deliberate act of kindness, bestowed by Sleep herself. Personified as a maid-friend, she shows a compassionate reluctance to interrupt the erotic fantasies of Nala and Damayanti with her veil of unconsciousness.

The term this verse uses for the meditative absorption of lovers in these imaginings (*saṃkalpa*) is in fact the previous of the ten stages in the Sanskrit ennumeration which the author has similarly depicted in the preceeding verse [1.22, p.80]. The verse following the treatment of sleep bridges with equal cleverness into the next stage of amorous pining, the loss of appetite and subsequent emaciation. This verse declares it to be no wonder that once the dear friend of the eyes, Sleep, had left them, the water of tears should choose to follow her and likewise exit the eyes (in weeping). What our poet declares remarkable, instead, is that the lovers' armlets have similarly slipped from their natural position on their upper arms (showing the wasting of their limbs in the emaciation of longing) [1.24, p.80]. In this way, Maḷamaṅgalam similarly displays over some twenty-four verses how most of the conventional stages of lovesickness were sequentially experienced through the symptoms and behaviors of Nala and Damayanti, prior to their wedded union.

Equally enmeshed in Sanskrit convention is another verse from the second half of the work, which Uḷḷūr also praises, in description of the moon:

> Bringing dejection to the ruddy geese, and promoting the survival of the race of partridges, making the lakes of water-lilies who are his consorts into fields of virtue, agitating the desolation of those who are separated, while he heightens the sweet flood of rapture that fulfills the beauty of those who are united, the moon, the abode of nectar, rose [2.73, p.116].

Again, the keying of this verse is entirely internal to the poetic conventions of Sanskrit literature. To savor this verse the Kerala audience would have had to know that ruddy geese are supposed to woefully part from their mates each night, only to be reunited at sunrise, that the species of partridge named is supposed to derive nourishment through drinking moonlight, that the water-lily ponds, whose blossoms open only at night, are imagined as wives of the moon, and that the sensual stimulants of nature, such as moonlight, which heighten the joys of satiation for united lovers, work conversely to pain the lovelorn in their separation. Just as the tropes presuppose

Sanskrit literary models, so the language of this verse has only a few words and grammatical elements of Malayalam, in an otherwise lexically and grammatically Sanskrit matrix.

Some other verses, however, and parts of the prose passages to which I will return shortly, reflect more of the local vocabulary and grammatical structures. This somewhat more vernacularized style came to characterize Maḷamaṅgalam's later *campu*s, which were written for the non-Brahman Cochin kings who subsequently became his patrons. These later works were indeed courtly romances for royal consumption, and we might follow Uḷḷūr in viewing the *Naiṣadha Campu* as the work where Maḷamaṅgalam first worked out his Maṇipravāḷam medium in a highly Sanskritized register, before shifting into the more vernacular style to suit the tastes of local royalty (1954, 417–33). In any case, it should be evident that this introduction of Nala into the literary culture of Kerala was not intended for a vernacular audience, except to the extent they were already versed in the language and poetics of Sanskrit.

The Intertextual Context of Sanskrit *Kāvya*: Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhacarita*

There was a well developed, pre-existing and highly textualized context for treating the Nala story as high literature in Sanskrit, which conditioned its adaptation into Maṇipravāḷam, and later, Malayalam. While the basic plot line of the *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu* is taken, as it is with most versions of Nala's story in Sanskrit, ultimately from the simple epic telling of the *Mahābhārata*, the major artistic prototype which makes of this tale high Sanskrit literature in the erotic mode is the twelfth-century *Naiṣadhacarita* of Śrīharṣa.[8] Though Śrīharṣa's work was the last and most difficult of the five great *kāvya*s (*mahākāvya*) in Sanskrit, it spread rapidly through India and was popular enough in the south to spark major commentaries commissioned in connection with the Telugu and Vijayanagara courts by the fourteenth century, whence, we can assume it spread to Kerala (Śrīharṣa 1965: xxix–xxi).

The influence of Śrīharṣa is directly evidenced in Kerala literature not just in terms of the Nala story, but in the genre of the later vernacular *campu* itself, as seen in its chief exemplar. This work, the great *Bhāṣā Rāmāyaṇa Campu* of Punam Nambūtiri, seized the Kerala stage in the fifteenth century as the model for all subsequent Maṇipravāḷam *campu*s in the region, including Maḷamaṅgalam's, a century later (Śarmma 1967). Punam adopted a number of Sanskrit passages directly from Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhacarita*, redeploying them from the characters of the Nala story to those of his *Rāmāyaṇa*. While Maḷamaṅgalam does not directly borrow any textual passages from Śrīharṣa, he does take a passage verbatim from Punam's Kerala work. Interestingly, this passage leans heavily towards the vernacular end of the literary mix in Maṇipravāḷam, and we will see shortly that he was also influenced directly by Punam's prose portions, which anchor these *campu*s unmistakably to Kerala.

Given the powerful general influence of Śrīharṣa's *Naiṣadhacarita*, modern scholars laud the apparent independence of Maḷamaṅgalam in having nowhere lifted any verses, phrases, or locutions directly from the Sanskrit *kāvya*. Despite the absence of direct citation, however, it is certain that Maḷamaṅgalam had Śrīharṣa's model for turning the Nala story into a romantic *kāvya* firmly before him. Aside from the similarity to Śrīharṣa's title, the very structure of his *campu* suggests this. Śrīharṣa's telling of the story uses only the first part of the *Mahābhārata*'s narrative of Nala, expending fourteen *sargas* ("cantos") merely to get to the bride-choice (*svayamvara*) marriage of Damayantī. It ends with Śrīharṣa's own dilation on their marriage festivities and blissful sexual union that drags on for an excruciating eight more *sargas*, where it ends, leaving out all of the couple's subsequent adventures—their loss of kingdom, separation from each other, change of identities, reunion, and so on. While Maḷamaṅgalam does cover the entire Epic narrative, he divides his *campu* into two halves, the first part (*pūrva-bhāgam*) comprising the same material as Śrīharṣa, with a similar focus on the erotic aesthetic (*śṛṅgāra*). The latter part (*uttara-bhāgam*) then covers all the rest of the *Mahābhārata*'s tale, but highly compressed with much

ellipsis of events, ending with the couple's reunion, but leaving many other loose ends of the plot hanging unresolved. The second part seems further different in that critics concur in judging it to lack most of the poetic merits that the first part exhibits (Uḷḷūr 1954:418). (This suggests to me a discrete composition, perhaps conceived as a different day's performance, as we will see was the case with such divisions in our other two genres of Nala's narrative).

While there are some particulars of plot in the first part that do not follow Śrīharṣa, other innovations do clearly derive from the *Naiṣadhacarita*. One example that creates an extended sequence of verses will have thematic significance when we turn to our later Kerala genres of Nala's tale. This is the use of the wedding contest (*svayamvaram*) as an occasion for Damayanti's companion to describe all of the rival kings who are there to vie with Nala for her hand. (Punam, a century earlier, actually lifted some verses from this very section of Śrīharṣa to include in his own adaptation for Sītā's *svayamvaram* in his *Rāmāyaṇa Campu*, the only work we know Maḷamaṅgalam directly borrowed from.)[9] Similarly, in keeping with the general mood of dilating on the erotic *rasa* of *śṛṅgāra*, Maḷamaṅgalam, like Śrīharṣa, concludes his first part with extended verses in description of the wedding party and the erotic nuptials of the blissful couple.

Lastly, let us consider a more trivially brief insertion, but one that unmistakably shows borrowing from Śrīharṣa and will also show the intertextual play between our Kerala authors across later genres. In the original source in the *Mahābhārata*, when Nala captures the swan (or goose)[10] that is to become his messenger to Damayantī, the bird simply states that it should not be killed, for it will do Nala a favor [3.50.19; p.323].[11] Śrīharṣa, however, has the swan lament for some dozen verses about the grief its wife and family will experience at his death, and after its release, reflects on the compassion Nala has shown him [1.130–42; pp.16–17], since the sacred laws allow kings to kill animals in the hunt [2.10; p.19].[12] Maḷamaṅgalam has clearly picked up on these ideas, for his swan complains: "If your lordship, an abode of compassion, contemplates this cruelty, it is totally ignoble. If the thing you desire is flesh, then

my body is not meaty... While if she sees me no more, my lady-swan will certainly begin at once wailing" [1. *gadyam* 2, p.83]. Though the presentation of ideas here is evidently condensed (Maḷamaṅgalam's work being about one thirtieth the length of Śrīharṣa's), it is certain that our *campu* found their source in the earlier *mahākāvya*, and we will see how this little vignette found favor with our later authors in Kerala as well.

Addressing the Context of Performance

While it is clear that Maḷamaṅgalam's forbiddingly Sanskritic work could not have been widely "popular," either in intent or reception, there were nevertheless a number of specific contextual anchorages to his region and sub-culture that I wish to consider. As with many Sanskrit works and the Maṇipravāḷam compositions that imitate them, the *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu* begins with verses of praise (*vandana ślokas*) that extol chosen deities of the author, as well as those of the patron. In Maḷamaṅgalam's case, he invokes his family goddess by name, as she is located in the particular temple of his locale [1.1; p.76]. He further alludes to her as the fifty-one letters (*akṣaras*) of his own language, and as the consort of Śiva, who overcame that god's effort to conquer lust and through her efforts won the connubium with him that secures her own wealth of beauty and auspiciousness. In this way, the poet at once anchors his own lineage goddess to the phonic substance of his poem and conveys a foretaste of its erotic thematic. With his second verse, he similarly praises Viṣṇu in the form of Anantaśayana, reportedly the family deity of the chieftain under whose patronage he composed this work, and likewise invokes the erotic aesthetic through the god's resort to the cool pair of his consort, Lakṣmī's, breasts [1.2; p.76]. In this way, textual references to particular deities serve to indirectly tie authors, patrons, and their places of worship into the aesthetic intent of the work as a whole.

More specific to the genre of the Maṇipravāḷa *campu* is another practice that ties the work more directly to the context of local performance. This is a convention in which introductory verses to

each section are addressed by the author-reciter to a friend or accompanist on stage. These verses at once index and praise the learned audience, while simultaneously alluding to the content of the composition itself. Observe how this is done in the third verse of Maḷamaṅgalam's *campu*:

> Oh Friend, when I see your revered self in this assembly—an aggregate of aesthetic taste and wisdom—then a nectarous stream of the greatest joy surges anew in my mind. It is like the extreme rapture in which king Naḷa lived, after he married the gracious and beautiful daughter of the king of Vidarbha... [1.3; p.76]

And with this, he launches into two verses and a following prose section describing the magnificence of Naḷa (to use the Kerala spelling),[13] and his rule, and thus proceeds to tell the story through the wedding of Naḷa and Damayanti and their connubial bliss, as advertised in the introductory verse just cited.

The second half of the work, the *uttara-bhāgam*, is similarly structured, suggesting that the work as a whole was designed for a performance split over two successive phases or two days. It opens with a new invocatory verse, this time to Ardhanareśvarī, a form of Śiva, half (*ardha-*) of whom is the male (*-nara-*) god, and half of whom is the goddess (*-īśvarī*) fused with him [2.1; p.103]. Earlier Maṇipravāḷam works similarly began with an invocation to this incarnation of Śiva, as representing the ideal of male-female erotic union, pointing to the inter-textual linkages within the Kerala tradition.[14]The intention to evoke this erotic theme here is confirmed by our author's very words. His praise is to "the moon-crested [Śiva]... who bears on his left side that rapturous being (*laharīm*) who is fragrant with the unrivaled knowledge of the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*)." The theme of the separation and ultimate reunion of Naḷa and Damayanti which takes up the second part is then correspondingly alluded to in the following verse, which, as in the introduction to the first half, invokes the friend on the stage who accompanies the reciter. In this verse, the joy of the performer is likened to that of Damayanti, when, after grieving for Naḷa in separation, she searched out and regained him in an arousal of joy (*saukhyodaya*).

Society in the Text

We have seen that in terms of the *campu* form, where anything not conforming to Sanskrit metrics was putatively prose (*gadyam*), Kerala authors inserted long passages in local, Dravidian meters. The corresponding content of some such sections is similarly local, and this most often occurs in the narrative context of depicting festivals (*utsavams*), marriages, and other such public events. We will indeed see how such settings seem deliberately and reflexively turned on the social milieu of Kerala, and occur across genres. Exemplifying this is the following passage of Malamaṅgalam's "prose" that eavesdrops on those attending Damayanti's *svayamvaram* marriage.

Even the Lord of Speech lacks the heights of eloquence to expound on the different stories of each of the varied folk who eagerly come together:

"Vasu, when did you arrive from the north? How many times over these ten years that have passed, I've wished I could see you! Caught in one sorrow after another of this worldly existence, so many troubles have delayed me. When Iṭṭi Nāṟāṇan is at our manor (*illam*), will he trouble himself at all to look after our home? Does he know enough to be at all bothered? Dammit, I'm the one who's tormented like this. How much trouble there has been over offspring! On the word of that astrologer, what's-his-name—dammit—I got prematurely married four times, and, as far as I recall, by these four, I got ten daughters and not a single son! Two of them have matured, and must now stay indoors, and two are getting ready for this, and two have had their tonsures done. Just the other day, I did the first rice-feeding for one of them. Now three of them were born under the [inauspicious] asterism of Mūlam, and I have not yet given names for them. Like this, I have to rack my brains. Aren't there ten of them? Aside from showing up at noon for the rite of feasting the ancestors, Iṭṭi Nāṟāṇan is not to be seen. Since we lack any capital, we're in debt to the tune of 5,000."

[Thinking] he will ramble on at length like this, [Vasu says,] "We need to be alert now; it's time for the feast! Let's leave a loin-cloth to save our places, and go tend to our ablutions so we can get back early enough to exchange all our information."

Declaiming in such a fashion, gaggles of these "lords of the earth" wandered here and there in various areas, bearing their dripping bathing

cloths, their traveling bundles, sandals, bamboo staffs and umbrellas [1.*daṇḍakam* 2, pp.93–94].

The subject-matter here is specific to Kerala's Brahmins, their lineage manors (*illams*), marriage and kinship system, and even their dialect. Brahmins in Kerala had a system of strict primogeniture, in which only the eldest male in any generation's sibling cohort could marry Brahmin women and produce legitimate heirs (Mencher and Goldberg 1967). This prevented partition through generational increase by keeping the estate and its assets intact, preserving the corporateness of the lineage. All younger males had casual liaisons with Ambalavāsi and Śūdra women, whose offspring belonged to the lower castes. The Iṭṭi Nārāṇan (dialect for Nārāyaṇan) referred to above is by implication away with his various consorts, rather than at home, helping to manage lineage affairs. Since Brahmin women could not marry into castes beneath them, there was a heavy gender imbalance of excess women, who remained either closely guarded spinster shut-ins, or were married into polygynous unions around the elder Brahmin males. Given the premium on eligible male inheritors producing male heirs, the comedic predicament above brings together all the structural tensions of the Brahminical system: an older male with multiple wives succeeding in producing only girls who are a ritual and practical burden, with male kinsmen who are off enjoying themselves, leading to indebtedness to meet their expenses. And yet, again in a Kerala stereotype, such needy Brahmins nevertheless flock to any festival event, where they are at least assured of being feasted by the event's patrons as a show of religious virtue, and where they may hope to pick up additional religious fees (*dakṣiṇa*).

The continuation of this passage similarly goes on to detail other such hangers-on at the festival. Maḷamaṅgalam gives us conversational snippets from astrologers, arguing with each other about which asterisms are most auspicious for the wedding. Then come various sorcerers (*mantravādis*), proclaiming the efficacy of their various charms—especially to seduce women—along with the bizarre and distinctly un-Brahminical ingredients these entail (such as crow's or iguana's flesh, or ash from roasted leeches). Similarly, physicians,

musicians, mercenaries, and the lower castes on society's fringes, along with their wives, all flock to the scene and create the hubbub and fracas that characterizes the festival (*utsavam*). As we shall see, there is a distinctly Bakhtinian aspect of the carnivalesque at play here (Bakhtin 1984), in which Kerala society intrudes into the Sanskrit universe, and it is precisely this that is later opened up and exploited to the full in our final genre of *tuḷḷal*.

Such insertions obviously have nothing to do with the Nala story, per se, as it comes down from the Sanskrit sources. They rather use the Sanskrit frame as a pretext to portray or critique local society. But neither is the content of the prose section which we reviewed the creative idea of Maḷamaṅgalam. It hearkens back, almost in its very diction, to the *Bhāṣā Rāmāyaṇa Campu* of Punam Nambūtiri from the previous century, where the context of Sītā's wedding introduces the same cast of characters in a series of similar prose passages. There one Brahmin hails another, with the same queries, and details virtually the same list of complaints about his *illam*. There then follow more extensive separate prose sections similarly engaging sorcerers, doctors, astrologers, soldiers, and so forth, such as we find in Maḷamaṅgalam [Śarmma 1967, *gadyams* 2–5; pp. 194–202].

Such evidently humorous depictions of various sectors of society, almost always in these public, festival contexts, goes back in Kerala to the still earlier Maṇipravāḷam works of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the *campu* form seems to have been taking shape in the milieu of courtesan culture, before making the shift into the religious narratives of the Purāṇas.[15] That there was some special thematic significance to the publicly festive, rowdy, tumultuous, and potentially dangerous energies of such forums, particularly around bringing various martial groups together in prospective alliances, seems evident, and gains particular confirmation in connection with the Nala story in Kerala as it emerges in our latter two genres.

In this connection, the one passage of metered verse that Maḷamaṅgalam lifts verbatim from the earlier Punam is a description of the various rival kings, whose armies converge on Damayanti's

father's capital to vie for her hand. While the metric is Sanskritic, the vocabulary is more heavily Dravidian, focused here on describing the various royal accouterments:

> With royal umbrellas and standards borne in succession that stretched into the distance, fanned by gleaming chowries that interspersed these, following thus on one another these leonine kings advanced on the city, as the reverberation of their war-drums filled the quadrants [1.87; p.91].

We will return to such martial themes below, but it is worth noting here, given that the Naḷa narrative is a warrior's romance, how our author positioned himself in relation to the wider social order. As a Brahmin, Maḷamaṅgalam's comedic jibes in his prose sections were primarily focused on déclassé elements within the Brahminic fold itself, and on the higher of the non-Brahmin classes. Yet, the very fact that he wrote not in Sanskrit, but rather drew on his Sanskrit in the hybrid idiom of Maṇipravāḷam that reached down to the vernacular elites, indexes his dependence on them, and the wider relations of Brahmins with these non-Brahmin castes more generally. In fact, Maḷamaṅgalam's domestic life was reportedly shaped around his relation with an Ambalavāsi women of Trichur, from whose manor he cultivated his patronage by the Cochin kings (Uḷḷūr 1954:295). He is also then credited in this milieu with having authored a number of Brāhmaṇi Pāṭṭus, a genre of folk-song used by women of his wife's caste for singing in the context of worship in goddess temples, and in marriages and other ritual occasions of the higher Śūdras (Uḷḷūr 1954:427). If Brahmins were thus reaching "down" to the vernacular elites below them, as we see in the very form of the Naḷa *campu*, and its conformity not to Sanskrit canons, but those of its local genre, then those of non-Brahmin caste had also long been reaching "up" from their vernacular roots, to appropriate what they could of the Sanskrit legacy.

Kathakaḷi and the *Naḷacaritam*

Illustrative of this is the Kerala version of the Nala story composed in the early eighteenth century for the vernacular dance-drama form

of *kathakaḷi*. Emerging from the late medieval courts, *kathakaḷi* had been consolidated only in the seventeenth century as a kind of vernacular response to the earlier Cākyār tradition of Sanskrit staging, evidently fused with the ancient Dravidian traditions of costumed possession-dance that characterize much of lower-caste worship in Kerala (Kṛṣṇakkaimaḷ 1989:19–54). Unlike the caste-specific, Cākyār's Sanskrit theater, the actors of *kathakaḷi* included actors from the Ambalavāsi and Śūdra castes, drawing especially on the tradition of military gymnasia among the Nāyar warriors. While most major performances were staged on temple grounds, in conjunction with religious festivals, palaces and Brahmin manors (*illams*) were also acceptable *kathakaḷi* venues. These latter forums marked only a slight expansion of the audience over earlier genres, however, since this was still considered sacred theater, performed as ritual in a consecrated space, cordoned off according to high-caste pollution strictures on attendance.

The "actors" in *kathakaḷi* never recite their script, but only mime it through an elaborate gestural language of *mudras*, while their lines are sung by background singers to the accompaniment of percussion ensembles. In the earlier structural form of these "scripts" (*āṭṭakatha*), the individual scenes are set in descriptive verses in metered Sanskrit, while the characters' lines and dialogue are in a Maṇipravāḷam that was often far more slanted towards the vernacular than the earlier *campus*.

The *kathakaḷi* script of Naḷa, the *Naḷacaritam*, is reckoned as one of the greatest works of premodern Malayalam literature. It innovated in a number of ways over earlier scripts, including using Maṇipravāḷam rather than Sanskrit verses to open many of the scenes, and pushing the dialogue sometimes very close to a common idiom of vernacular (Ajayakumār 1999:33–44; Kṛṣṇakkaimaḷ 1989:122–66). Throughout, however, it clearly maintained a Sanskrit aesthetic, judiciously deploying Sanskrit verses, but also developing its own idiom of using that language that seemed to naturalize it in the Malayalam context. These peculiarities are often attributed to the play's temple-servant author modeling his work more closely on the Sanskrit theater, marking its stylistic and thematic distance

from the military gymnasia of royal patrons where *kathakaḷi* originally flourished, despite his more vernacular linguistic bent.

Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar in his Historical Context

The author of the *Naḷacaritam* was one Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar, Vāriyar being a caste of Ambalavāsi whose principal occupation was the rather humble one of supplying garlands for worship in Brahminical temples. In his case, distinguished literary accomplishment seems to have left the folk-memory of some tensions around his upward mobility. First, as is frequent with great non-Brahmin literati, certain stories claim that a Brahmin must have sired him, while others dispute this on behalf of non-Brahmins (Uḷḷūr 1955:271–72). Second, and more pertinently reflective of the general competitive tension between the Cākyār's Sanskrit drama and the newer vernacular *kathakaḷi* is the following story.

A famous Cākyār had heard of Vāriyar's literary acumen, and came one day to perform in the temple where Vāriyar worked. When the Cākyār enacted his drama in the sacred theater, however, he noticed that Vāriyar had not come to see his performance. When he later asked Vāriyar why he had not come to see him, Vāriyar retorted that the actor had likewise not come to see his garland-making. When the Cākyār came to see his floral arrangements for worship the next day, he was astonished to read, woven out of the flowers, the very verse extolling the deity of the temple that the Cākyār himself had previously used in the theater (Warrier 1977:14–15). This is taken as illustrative of how, out of the humbler local materials that are *kathakaḷi*, the genius and religious merit of the Sanskritic world were captured. In Vāriyar's case, that capture came solely through his appropriation of the Nala story, the only work on which his fame rests.

The famous temple in the above legend to which Vāriyar was attached belonged to the realm of the Cochin kings of central Kerala. It seems that, as with the praise verses of Maḷamaṅgalam, those originally attached to his *Naḷacaritam* confirm Vāriyar's fealty to the gods of that political realm and its rulers. In addition to a verse in praise of his own temple's god, the other five verses are all to

gods in temples that were either family deities of the Cochin kings, or that they conspicuously patronized (Uḷḷūr 1955:269–70).

What is most significant about Vāriyar's historical context (c. 1675–1755 CE) is that his shifting patronage base reflected the rise of Travancore in southern Kerala, as the expansion of what was in many ways an early modern state, at the expense of the old order which Kerala scholars call "feudal." The great king Mārtāṇḍa Varma led this militarist expansion, swallowing up all the principalities to his north beginning in the 1730's and annexing many of Cochin's former territories and allies until he battled them to a truce in 1757. Presumably as a result of these conquests, historians record that Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar became one of Travancore's court poets, likely in his later years. Though the records of the Travancore state's chief temple show that the *Naḷacaritam* was performed there with other *kathakaḷi* dramas in 1745, the absence of any mention of the realm's chief deity in the original praise verses, points to the composition of the work prior to Vāriyar's patronage by the Travancore court (Uḷḷūr 1955, 270). That the *Naḷacaritam* achieved the subsequent notoriety it did, generally minus these initial dedicatory verses, attests to the transplantation of the author and his work into a later regime of circulation, under the patronage of a powerful new state.

The Open Textuality of the *Kathakaḷi* "Text"

Though compared to the earlier *Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu*, the *Naḷacaritam* is far less Sanskritic in its form, it has greater scope to develop more intensely the expression of *rasa*, the aesthetic and emotional savor that is the dominant, putative aim of all Sanskrit drama and poetry.[16] The *Naḷacaritam* is considerably longer, being divided up for performance over four days of staging, so there is a much more leisurely development of story and lingering over the emotionally thematic content of each scene, compared to the almost hurried ellipsis (especially in the second half) that characterizes the verses of Maḷamaṅgalam's *campu*.

Aside from the surface structure of the actual script, however, there is a further performative dimension shared as a genre feature

of all *kathakaḷi* that dilates on these capacities for exploration of the story's themes. This is called *iḷakiyāṭṭam*, (literally "agitation dance"), a kind of expository dance on each particular scene performed after the background lines are sung, enacted entirely in gestural language by the actor according to his "originality" or "inspiration" (*manodharmam*) (Appukuṭṭanpiḷḷa 1996; Warrier 1977:37–43). The gestural language has an actual vocabulary of many hundreds of "words" and syntactic conventions for construing them. But while *iḷakiyāṭṭam* has, at its best, a certain improvisational tenor, there is a high degree of convention and disciplining that underlies this.

In the guru-student manner of extended apprentice training, there is, in fact, a kind of floating corpus of verses that students study, in Sanskrit, which are learned to inspire the gestural monologues. While these may be drawn from existing *kāvya* works in Sanskrit, the samples I have read come all from the genius of local poets (Appukuṭṭanpiḷḷa 1996). But whatever the source, nowhere is the fluidity of boundaries between the literary and the performative more in evidence than in this kind of orally and gesturally learned local Sanskrit corpus of verse, which varies from lineage to lineage, but which is essential to performance of the play itself. This feedback from performance into "text" is even in evidence with regard to the main script itself, for there are variant "readings" that contemporary scholars argue over, and various ways of reckoning and dividing scenes, dependent on the lineage traditions that perform and transmit them.

Naḷa's "Self" as a Social and Religious Problem

But what are these literary themes that are thus expressed through this great work of literature and performance? Certainly the general emotional tenor is the erotic (*śṛṅgāra*), in both its frustrated expression through separation (*viraha*) and fulfillment in union (*sambhoga*), such as we find in Maḷamaṅgalam. The other constituent, however, which is essential to the plot and its narrative-psychological appeal, is the potential ruination of Naḷa, both from forces within and without, and his eventual recovery of wholeness.

As Shulman has characterized the *Mahābhārata* original and some of its regional versions, it is a "story about a man who lost his 'self'—along with everything else that was his" (Shulman 1994:1). As he further explains, this also entails struggles with fate and chance and possession by forces seemingly "other" that are yet parts of Nala's alienated self. While this exposition perhaps translates the conflict driving the plot into Western-universalist terms, it is important to bear in mind that within the Indian and Kerala context of the story itself, this is rendered more concretely in the idiom of demonic possession by Kali and his allied powers and the struggle to vanquish these. Certainly from the perspective of a canonical Western "self" that Shulman provides, it is an individual's definition and integrity that are at issue. Beyond the individual, however, it is not only Naḷa's "psyche" that is possessed, but also his kingdom and his social world. The integrity of the one cannot be restored without engaging the ills of the other, and the enormity of the problem makes its scope take on religious dimensions that require supernatural solutions (see also Wadley 2004; this volume).

The original story in the *Mahābhārata* is of course framed as an exemplary tale to encourage the despondent Pāṇḍava king, Yudhiṣṭhira, in his exile: if Nala could overcome the vagaries of his fate, then certainly Yudhiṣṭhira can do the same [3.49.35–43; pp.318–19]. Nala, however, is actually possessed by Kali [3.56.3–4; p.30], who is not only a personally vindictive demon, but the presiding spirit of this degenerate world age. The cure for Nala's possession is a magical knowledge (*vidyā*), at once a power (*bala*), [3.70.22; p.353] which, compounded with the earlier curse of Damayantī against Kali, and the physically transformative poison of the serpent-being, Karkotaka's bite, leads to the demon's exorcism [3.70.27–28; p. 354]. The promise Kali makes to future generations of mortals within the tale itself is that if they ceaselessly praise Nala, they will be free of fear from Kali [3.70.33; p.354]. In the closing frame of the tale, Yudhiṣṭhira is told that, "This history is said to spell the destruction of Kali... To him who narrates the great story of Nala and listens to it ceaselessly, misfortune will never fall" [3.78.10,12].[17] There then follows a brief list of the gains that come from reciting and hearing

this story, clearly as the kind of *phala-śruti*, the self-advertising announcement of effective results that is often associated with the keeping of religious vows [3.78.13; p. 364].

It is this framing which admits the *Naḷacaritam* into *kathakaḷi*, for the performative genre is, above all, sacred theater, and performances were commissioned and subvented as meritorious acts, tantamount to religious vows. The Naḷa of *kathakaḷi* is, above all, a pious embodiment of religious rectitude (*dharma*), who struggles with the evils of the age, internal and external, embodied in Kali. The religious values Naḷa incarnates, though, are disjunctive neither from the heroic or erotic refinements of the aesthetic experience of theater. *Kathakaḷi* attempts to bring them all together. The last verse of the play's introduction accordingly proclaims Naḷa to be

> He whose narrative (*caritam*) is the *rasa*-antidote that alleviates Kali,
> Whose heroic valor (*vīrya*) compares to Indra's,
> Who habitually worships Viṣṇu and Śiva,
> Who is beyond the reach of speech or mind [79–80; 68][18]

There is word-play here on *rasa*, the essentialized emotion of aesthetic experience, which literally means the sap or juice of a plant, its beneficent essence. Naḷa's story (the play that follows) thus promises to be the juicy essence (*rasa*) of the medicinal herb (*auṣadha*)—the refined aesthetic rapture—that quells the crude tumult of a degenerate epoch who is Kali. Yet, note that this aesthetic potency of Naḷa is also declared militarily valiant, worshipful, and, ultimately, religiously transcendent.

Despite the plethora of modern commentaries, however, I find little in Vāriyar's *Naḷacaritam* that suggests this hero ultimately "finds himself" in some modernist psychological breakthrough of self-disclosure. The understanding in the *Naḷacaritam* is that this powerful, effective knowledge (*siddhavidyā*) that works within the story is merely a verbal spell, a *mantram*, that grants Naḷa a ritually instrumental mastery over Kali to expel the demon out of his body, and threaten him with death. When Kali suggests, quite plausibly, that Naḷa has experienced the fruition of his own haughty behavior, and that he thinks only of how Kali has schemed against him, while

masking his own wrong-doing, Nala simply reviles him as a schemer, and threatens to cut his throat. Kali then reveals that though he is constitutionally a polluted and powerless being, he is only granted power through the defects (*vaikṛtam*) of others that Brahmā has written into their destinies that allows wrong-doing to proliferate. With the threat of death, Naḷa wrests from Kali a vow that he will no longer torment good folk, even if they are inclined to deviate occasionally in their behavior. Kali declares that he will honor the narrative (again, *caritam*) of Naḷa, and comply with his command out of respect for his fame (*kīrti*) [156–162; 209–213].

What this does, internal to the narrative, is render Naḷa's deeds and their consequences into the work of fate (*vidhi*, personified as Brahmā), which absolves the hero of any pervasive moral culpability in events. Accordingly, the remedy for these apparently internal evils, is to objectify them as demonic enemies and subdue them both through ritually instrumental means (Damayanti's magical curse, Karkotaka's poisonous antidote, and the final *mantra*), and through martial dominance. Framing the narrative, this suggests that some of the effective power exemplified by Naḷa's life within the story can be recaptured and applied without, through the very ritual re-enactment of the story itself in performance. This lends Naḷa at least the semblance of a religious sanctity and ritual effectiveness, which is, after all, the very *raison d'etre* of *kathakaḷi* as sacred theater, often sponsored as part of a religious vow. This is, as we have seen, part of the external, religious-magical promise of Naḷa's tale within the original setting of the *Mahābhārata* itself, and it is here parasitized by the repeated reflexive references to the power of Naḷa's *caritam* within the *kathakaḷi* play. But we might also consider, in this context, what the nature of this evil that needs remedying might be.

Harnessing Śrīharṣa to Kerala

The influence of the Sanskrit *kāvya* of Śrīharṣa is more evident in Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar's *kathakaḷi* script, than in Maḷamaṅgalam's *campu*, despite the fact that the partial treatment of Śrīharṣa's telling covers scarcely more than the first "day" of Vāriyar's extended four-day

performance.[19] To return to the case we noted of Śrīharṣa's innovation around the swan's initial pleas to Naḷa, Vāriyar has clearly studied these passages and adapted them in his own way [18–19; 73].

> My father has died, and I am the only son; such is my mother's condition.
>
> Moreover, and gravely, my beloved who has recently given birth will abandon her life, being totally bereft; with me, then, the entire family-line (*kulam*) has come to an end!

Scholars have read into this last line, with its focus on the family's extinction, an allusion to Vāriyar's lack of offspring in his own marriage, which led to the absorption of his lineage's rights into another through adoption (Uḷḷūr 1955:267).

While this evidence shows how Vāriyar adapted a minor embelishment of Śrīharṣa to his own composition, let us consider a more substantial borrowing that restructures part of Vāryiar's narrative, and that indicates how he viewed the demonic ills for which religious interventions were the palliative. Though Śrīharṣa's story ends with the initially happy wedded period of Naḷa and Damayanti's life, the appearance of the demonic Kali and his cohort does receive extended treatment, even where it doesn't seem to fit. In the original telling of the *Mahābhārata*, the gods encounter the demons, Kali and Dvāpara, when the former are returning to heaven from Damayanti's *svayamvaram* on earth, and as the latter pair are belatedly on their way to the same event, hoping to vie for the maiden's hand. There is only a brief exchange between them, when the demons learn that they are too late for the wedding, and vow to wreck the newlyweds' lives out of spite [3.55.1–13]. Śrīharṣa, however, casts the demonic pair in the company of an army of other evils, Lust, Wrath, Greed, and Delusion, who blaspheme and wrangle with the gods for an entire chapter of the work, celebrating all the ills of the age, before Kali resolves on his course against Naḷa and departs for earth [Canto XVII, pp.246–67].

Though Vāriyar has Kali declare himself accompanied by this this very same army of Lust, Wrath, Greed and Delusion, he dispenses with the long diatribes over virtue and vice in this scene, and follows the succinct developments of the *Mahābhārata*. The dramatic force

of Śrīharṣa's vicious horde, however, gets displaced into an earlier juncture in Vāriyar's telling of the story, a whole scene that he improvises to lead into, and alter the rationale for, another plot innovation that he also adopts from Śrīharṣa.

In the *Naiṣadhacarita*, as the rival bridegrooms assemble for the *svayamvaram*, Śrīharṣa has Damayanti's father, Bhīma, pray to Viṣṇu for help, because he feels inadequate to publicly praise the virtues of each of those splendid kings. In response, Viṣṇu deputes the goddess of speech, Sarasvatī, who, taking the role of Damayanti's attendant, proclaims the virtues of all the assembled kings, in turn [10.67, ff.; pp.146–47]. Vāriyar (unlike the earlier Maḷamaṅgalam) adopts this plot addition, but inserts a scene before it that pushes its rationale in another direction, one that I believe is significant in the interpretive trajectory the Naḷa story takes in Kerala. When the news of Damayanti's *svayamvaram* spreads among all the noble kings of the earth, and through Nārada, reaches heaven, it also draws the demonic Rākṣasas and Dānavas, arch-demon rivals of the gods, to earth, as well. They declare their malicious intention as follows, and then proceed to badger and threaten the other divine beings assembling there [53; 100]:

> We should kill the kings (defenders of men), cheat the gods,
> Crush the divine serpents, and forcibly seize the woman,
> Making those weaklings yearn...

Then, as they begin to struggle and quarrel with the other divine and human beings there, and as their abusiveness escalates, Bhīma prays to Viṣṇu. In distinct contrast to the motivation we find in Śrīharṣa, Bhīma acts not out of social embarrassment before the royal grandeur of the gathering assembly, but rather out of real fear (*bhīti*) at the threat of impending violence. The goddess's subsequent appearance in this case is a providential response to prayer that quells the burgeoning eruption of militancy among the rival forces. That this potential explosiveness is assumed as the background mood was earlier confirmed when Nārada, the divine sage, went to heaven, explicitly in the hopes of instigating Indra (chief of the deities and the old god of war) and the other divine beings into sparking warfare at the *svayamvaram*. He complains to Indra that his heart aches for the

sight of "unfettered warfare" (*anargalam samaram*), and after he has sown the seeds of conflict, he leaves for earth, hoping that "in that gathering of kings at her *svayamvaram*, there will be a fracas (*kalaham*)" [38–39; 88–89].

While Kali, as an internal disorder, is vanquished through ritual externalization and mastery, the association of demonic ills with worldly tumult in a militant context is confirmed by its antidote of martial strength in the final scene of the play. Nārada, the initial trouble-maker, returns to earth again, bringing Naḷa the message from Brahmā, the writer of our destinies, that

> All the evil wrought by Kali is banished;
> Let the greatest aupiciousness, free of impairment, rise for Naḷa... [208; 264]

These benedictions bring the play to a close, as the militantly celebratory embodiment of this newly secured state appears: Bhīma with Damayanti, accompanied with a vast army, the din of whose auspicious drumming fills the quadrants, and the thronging of whose lofty standards blackens the sky [209; 264].

From Naḷa's Self to the Social Stage

Both the erotic theme of love in separation and union, and the triumph of a divinely inspired martial heroism (*vīryam*) over the forces of demonic disorder form the commonest themes throughout the genre of *kathakaḷi*. Many plays, in fact, center far more on overt violence than the *Naḷacaritam*, often built on the slaying of demons by gods or epic heroes, whose demise is enacted by killing them on stage, occasionally with gruesome special effects, and in explicit violation of the norms of Sanskrit theater. In comparison with these, the *Naḷacaritam* is far more given over to the internal landscape of its characters' emotional broodings. Despite being praised as one of the greatest works of premodern Malayalam literature, however, it has long been criticized for its difficulty of staging in the *kathakaḷi* tradition. This has to do primarily with the way the complexity of the verbal language (in the "lines" of script that are sung) presents

challenges to the parallel "language" of mute bodily dance and manual gesture in which traditional *kathakaḷi* actors were trained in their gymnasia (Kṛṣṇakkaimaḷ 1989:122–66). A recent article has argued that the *Naḷacaritam* was in fact not widely staged before the modern period, and that it only spread as a popular work in the 1920s and 30s as the new individualism that characterizes modernity (mirrored through parallel developments in the growth of modern theater), encouraged actors to explore the inner dimensions of a play's characters through a personally interpretive engagement of acting that had not characterized traditional *kathakaḷi* (Ajayakumār 1999).

The reasons as to why the *Naḷacaritam* might have prefigured or have been preadapted to these individualist notions of character and acting are left open in this argument, but the suggestion I consider most fruitful is that this play reflects the far heavier influence of the Sanskrit tradition of drama through *kūṭiyāṭṭam*, in which the exploration of characters' emotional states and moods towards the development of the aesthetic savor (*rasa*) comes more to the fore (Ajayakūmar 1999:238). While it is true that Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar did not pursue these developments in strict accord with the rules of Sanskrit theater, I think we can see here in his attempt to press the content of Sanskrit into the native dramatic form and conventions of *kathakaḷi* the same kind of hybridity that we find in the linguistic make-up of his script's language. That the experiment was something of a popular failure outside of the courtly circuit that immediately patronized him gains evidence from the fact that no other *kathakaḷi* works are attributed to Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar.

I find far less likely the suggestion that the differences that mark the *Naḷacaritam* represent the advance edge of the kind of individualism we associate with modernity, even if these are the forces that later took it up as worthy in the renaissant, elite *kathakaḷi* sub-culture of the 1920s and 30s. Mārtāṇḍa Varma's Travancore was hardly a "modern" state in the formative stage that patronized Vāriyar, certainly did not foster the individual in any contemporary sense, and the historical evidence points to this play's composition well before this patronage, and outside Travancore, in any case.

Finally, in terms of Naḷa's "self," we have seen that there is very little sense of a conscience with a sense of morally reflexive culpability attached to it, reckoned by most to be essential to the individual in the modern sense (Taylor 1989). Efforts are rather directed to segregating off what is conflicted as an Other, whether in society or within Naḷa, assigning it the demonic identity of Kali, and militantly or magically exorcising it. Even the personal invasion of Naḷa by these forces is repeatedly chalked up to a divinely apportioned "fate" (*daivam*), which is countered by a ritual, and hence, an ultimately externalized striving. This view is amply confirmed in those verses that actors learn in order to inspire their gesturally "expository" *iḷakiyāṭṭam*, a number of which have been recorded from their lineage traditions. For instance, in some twenty-eight verses around which actors improvise in the scene during which Naḷa decides to abandon Damayanti alone in the forest, fate is repeatedly blamed, along with his possession by Kali, for what would otherwise seem his culpable motives and actions (Appukuṭṭanpiḷḷa 1996:45–58).

There is clearly an attempt in all of this to evoke the Sanskritic world of *rasa* as the cure for these ills, a cure which Naḷa's tale embodies as advertised in the play's opening verses. But this aesthetic-ritual exorcism of demonic forces does not seem to be actuated by some inward exploration and realization of a private self. Such psychological terrain seems distant from the more overtly dramatic struggles of Kerala society as projected on the stage of *kathakaḷi*. With the final genre that embraced the story of Naḷa in Kerala, the *ōṭṭan tuḷḷal*, we encounter Kali as the spirit of strife in this age as a force in the social world with still greater clarity.

Kuñcan Nambyār's *Tuḷḷal*

The genre of the next telling of Naḷa in Kerala is called *tuḷḷal*, (or *ōṭṭan tuḷḷal*, after its best known sub-genre), as this narrative dance form was developed by its key exponent and composer, Kuñcan Nambyār. This performance genre consists of a single dancer-singer in a standardized costume and make-up, accompanied by two percussionists, one of whom repeats each line as a back-up singer.

The costume is simple and rustic by comparison with the elaboration of *kathakaḷi*, the gestural language rudimentary, and there are no props, staging, and little acting, other than the hand gestures, dance postures and facial expression. The dance and dramatic accompaniment being thus rather underplayed, the emphasis is on the narrative and verbal composition of the works performed. It is in the wit, diction, verbal texture and rhythm of these compositions that Nambyār's acclaimed genius lay, and the Naḷa story is one among the some fifty *tuḷḷal* songs attributed to him (Śarma 1976).

While earlier literary tradition assigned the very invention of this form of *tuḷḷal* to Kuñcan Nambyār (including the sub-genres of *ōṭṭan*, *śītaṅkan*, and *paṟayan*, in which he composed), most scholars acknowledge that he must have simply taken up existing folk-forms, and standardized them for performance in the environs of temple festivals. The word *tuḷḷal* itself means to jump, often involuntarily, and is especially used for lower-caste dances under spirit possession in festival contexts.

Recalling the hierarchy of temple control and the castes involved, the legend of how Nambyār reputedly invented this genre highlights the caste tensions in a way reminiscent of the earlier legend of Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar and his encounter with the Cākyār actor. Nambyārs were temple drummers who accompanied the Sanskrit dramatic performances or monologues of the higher caste Cākyārs. The story goes that once when Kuñcan Nambyār was performing his traditional function this way in a temple drama, his accompaniment was publicly ridiculed by the Cākyār on stage. The next evening when the Cākyār took the stage, he found that not only was Nambyār absent, but the bulk of the audience was gone, as well. Nambyār had set up his own performance outside the temple theater, on the ground in the outer compound, and had stolen the enthralled audience away with his new art form of *tuḷḷal* (Uḷḷūr 1955:424–25).

While these circumstances are probably not historically accurate, there are a number of reflexive references within Nambyār's works to his having abandoned the difficult Sanskrit of high learning, for a language the common folk of Kerala, and especially the Nāyar soldiery, might appreciate.

The Art of Language in Nambyār's *Tuḷḷal*

Yet, by comparison with the actual oral and written literatures of these largely Śūdra classes of his audience (as they were reckoned by Brahmins), the lexicon and idioms of Nambyār's compositions were heavily Sanskritic, and the narrative content entirely so. All of Nambyār's *tuḷḷal* stories are fairly close adaptations of stories from the Sanskrit Purāṇas and Epics in terms of their leading characters and plots. Unlike the Maṇipravāḷam and Sanskrit mixtures of the *campu* or *kathakaḷi* literature, however, Nambyār's grammatical structures are almost entirely those of the local Kerala language. Similarly, the majority of his metric schemes are Dravidian, for the most part in simple couplets with the alliteration patterns that are characteristic of local poetic composition.

Where he rarely cites or constructs a Sanskrit verse, as he does twice in his *Naḷacaritam*, he glosses the semantic constituents in his own lines of poetry that immediately follow, by way of paraphrase. In this he seems to mimic or usurp the role of the Cākyār, much of whose art consisted of citation and gloss in this way. But in Nambyār's case this is only to show that he can do this, and that he can bring the Sanskrit of the temple out into the venue of his relatively more commoner audience. If he parasitizes the practice of the Cākyār's performance in this way, then he also appropriates *kathakaḷi* from time to time as well, embedding similar stanzaic structures and musical form from that genre in his work. Four times in his *Naḷacaritam*, for instance, Nambyār inserts a run of stanzas that fully duplicate the musical scale (*rāgam*), rhythm (*tāḷam*), and choral divisions (into *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and *caraṇam*) of a *kathakaḷi* score.

His own artistry, however, consists in his rollicking diction and narrative, and he simultaneously mocks the tedium of high Sanskrit forms in a number of his lines, even as he deploys an enormity of Sanskrit lexical and idiomatic usages. To embed these Sanskritisms in local rhythms, however, is to use them as much for their sound quality, as for their meaning, to see that their surrounding words and grammatical frames are Malayalam enough to be easily

intelligible, while exhibiting the cultural cachet of high learning to flatter the audience (Gaṇeś 1996:15–17).

What is most appreciated in Nambyār's *tuḷḷal*, aside from the rolling construction of his verse and overall control of language, is not the Sanskrit narratives or embellishments, but the vignettes of contemporary Kerala life that he embeds within his otherwise Puranic frameworks. Narratively, he practices a kind of studied anachronism in which denizens of his own Kerala populate the interstices of the ancient tales (Gaṇeś 1996:26–32). If a public event from the Puranic past is recounted, the Brahmins who attend it are local Nambūtiris and Tamil Paṭṭars, the kings are Kerala chiefs, the soldiery are Nāyars, and the peasantry are local Kerala castes with all their diacritical features. The buildings in which people live, the implements they use, the livelihoods they pursue, and the lands they range over and cultivate are those of his contemporary Kerala country, even where the putative setting is Rāma's Āyodhya, or Naḷa's Niṣadha. As the historian, K.N. Gaṇeś, has pointed out in a brilliant study of Nambyār, much of the bite in the irony and satire in these vignettes results from the juxtaposition of the expected dharmic virtue of epic settings and characters, jumbled with the glaringly flawed behaviors of a recognizably Kerala public (Gaṇeś 1996:26–32). In terms of the language of such passages, there is often a shift out of the usually Sanskritized vocabulary of the bulk of Nambyār's narrative frame, into the words and cadences of everyday life, including large stretches of reported speech by his characters.

Nambyār at Play with the Sanskritic Order

Nambyār's performance text of the *Naḷacaritam*, covers the Epic story only through the *svayamvaram* of Naḷa and Damayanti, and thus corresponds closely to the *Naiṣadhacarita* of Śrīharṣa, and to the first day of Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar's *kathakaḷi* script which was modeled on it. It is, in fact, usually subtitled "The First Day," making this association closer and differentiating it from the *tuḷḷal* text of "The Second Day," which covers all the rest of the Naḷa tale, and which is

clearly not the work of Nambyār, but of a later and grossly inferior imitator. It is reported that Nambyār was a younger contemporary of Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar, and that he perhaps authored an earlier literary song (in the genre called *kiḷippāṭṭu*) on the Naḷa story that shows a much clearer indebtedness to Vāriyar than the later *tuḷḷal* work (Uḷḷūr 1955:414–16).[20] While there are tales of these two authors interacting at the Trivandrum court of Mārtāṇḍa Varma who patronized them both, it is also clear that Nambyār drew more directly on the *Naiṣadhacarita* in his *tuḷḷal* (Uḷḷūr 1955:273, 280). Thus while the genre of *tuḷḷal* itself hearkened back to rusticated folk-forms, Nambyār's genius lay in the way he domesticated the Sanskrit world of the temple arts for more popular consumption by tailoring them to his art form.

The work itself begins with such an instance, where what was originally a verse in Sanskrit, used by Cākyārs in the temple theater, is opened up into a dialogue and indexically tied to Nambyār's own family deity. The original, highly condensed praise verse (*stuti*) used by the Cākyārs reports the goddess Pārvatī's puzzlement as to whether the various elements of the river Gaṅgā, which her lord, Śiva (as Gaṅgādhara), holds in his matted locks, are items of the river's natural ecology, or body-parts of the beautiful goddess (and rival consort), which Gaṅgā also is (Śarma 1976: 27). Nambyār turns this into a playful dialogue, in which Pārvatī sequentially goes through each item, challenging Śiva as to whether what she sees shimmering in his locks are not parts of a woman's body, and being countered, at each turn, by Śiva's protestations that they are merely features of the river [133–34].[21]

[Pārvatī:] "Don't tell tales, my Lord! I see here a lovely face."

[Śiva:] "It's not a face at all, but resting in the waters, it must be a full-blown lotus."

[Pārvatī:] "By what rights does one see around a full-blown lotus a mass of curly tresses?"

[Śiva:] "They are not curly tresses, but rows of bees gathered to drink its nectar."

This banter continues through a series of such pairs to Pārvatī's ultimate confusion, and the concluding benediction:

[Pārvatī:] "Is this speech in sport, or is it serious? This wrangle pierces my heart."

Thus may he—by whose duplicitous speech is Pārvatī's mind deceived—
As Gaṅgādhara, who in Kiḻḻikkuṟiśśi dwells as Śiva—may he protect and bless us!

The themes here are evocative of those that follow in the Naḷa tale, and in Nambyār's cynical view, of the world and human relations, generally. The romantic quest is ensnared in duplicity and lover's tricks; things and people are not as they appear, rivalries threaten on all fronts, and the gods themselves potentially embody, and traffic in, deceit. And yet, in all of this, we can only throw up our hands, pray for the best, and get on with the show. But again, as we saw with our earlier genres, these reflections of universal portent are embodied in the local, for the deceiving Śiva that Nambyār calls on by name, is that of Kiḻḻikkuṟiśśimaṅgalam, Nambyār's own family's temple-deity, and the entire prelude thus turns out to be a kind of parodic piece of formal praise (*stuti*) to the Lord.

Framing Naḷa's Performance with a Local Myth

This anchoring of the Naḷa story to Nambyār's Kerala by the various dialogic insertions of reference and characters takes on more comprehensive scope in the framing of the tale itself. For immediately following the long invocation of Śiva as just sketched, we enter the court of one Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ whose predicament serves as the frame-story for Nambyār's *Naḷacaritam* [134–35]. While there are some folk-stories concerning this "World Ruler" in circulation across southern Kerala and Tamil Nadu, historians are pretty much in agreement that he did not exist as any historically significant, named king, but is rather the precipitate in folk memory of various local chieftains who were posthumously regarded as popular and virtuous (Gaṇeś 1996:263–81; Uḷḷūr 1979).[22] For Nambyār, he seems to stand in for the paradigmatic embattled and righteous chief of yore, for as noted, Nambyār lived on the cusp of the early modern, when the medieval order of local rulers was being swallowed by the modernizing, militarily and financially expansionist Travancore state

of Mārtāṇḍa Varma (Uḷḷūr 1955:272–73). Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ's realm, like that of Naḷa, had come to be afflicted by the ills of Kali, and so when the king complains of this to his ministers, one of them recommends the recitation of Naḷa's tale, as a sure cure to the corruption of this age. This dialogue is itself a mini-frame for the long list of ills that beset the Perumāḷ's (and Nambyār's) society [134–35].

The literary device of Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ thus serves to contextually frame the Naḷa story within Kerala at three different, but intertwined levels: by bridging between the mythical time of Naḷa and the application of the tale's portent to a fictional but paradigmatically contemporary Kerala polity; at the level of the specific social and cultural content recounted as symptomatic of Kali's local manifestation; and finally, in the contextual placement of the whole Naḷa narrative as an instance, not of pan-Indic tale, but of local, ritually effective recitation on the occasion of religious festivals such as those for which Nambyār actually constructed and performed this work.

In the expansion of the content of Kali's ills, for which the courtly setting is pretext, the complaints interweave traditionally generic linkages of morality, nature, and polity, with those more specific to Nambyār's time and place. In this Kali age, religion has fallen by the wayside: unguents intended for sacred markings on the bodies of worshippers are used to draw gaming boards, and a local demonic godling, Kuṭṭiccāttan, sports in Vaiṣṇava shrines. Subjects undermine their liege lords, even as kings seek only their own enjoyments. Women have loose morals, and men are ever after them. Agricultural prices are falling, pests invade fields, every one is in hock, staking their homesteads to raise money, while money lenders cheat them. No one knows their place any more. Crimes abound and people will even accost the virtuous, and kill cows. Śūdras pretend to recite sacred texts and even Brahmins and others heed them, while those learned in scriptures pretend to virtue by day, then sneak off from their temples at night. People don't hesitate to pollute their temples by chewing betel and spitting in the precincts, and the trustees will strip the buildings' copper to sell it for buying tobacco. As a final sign of encroaching colonial orders, Nambyār notes that kings are

out to ally themselves with the Dutch (Landar), Portuguese (Paṟaṅki), and English (Iṅgirayes). As the minister concludes,

Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ should know that if he wishes to end the Kali-curse,
The great story of the deeds of Naḷa may be told with great enthusiasm.
And if it is considered somewhat deficient in entertainment, then its virtue in destroying Kali's pollution is all the greater [135].

In a more concrete elaboration of the claims for the Naḷa narrative in *kathakaḷi*, where the aesthetic powers of the play's *rasa* are claimed as palliative for the hero's (and audience's) mental and emotional affliction by demons, the ills here are externalized, graphically listed, overtly socio-political, and historically Kerala-specific. Furthermore, the concluding lines cited above acknowledge that the work may be artistically deficient, but nonetheless ritually effective. And finally, the whole meta-framing within the context of a Kerala-specific (if fictional) chiefdom, serves to analogically extol the effectiveness of such performances as Nambyār crafted the work for enacting, bridging between the remote claims of the epic Sanskrit world, and the regional folk-traditions rooted in local sensibilities. Correspondingly, at the conclusion of Nambyār's Naḷa tale, there is a coda to this larger frame, confirming its results:

Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ contemplated this whole story, retaining it well in his mind.
Ulakuṭe will rejoice at the prosperity this has brought; the flourishing of his family's might is secured.[23]

Although this frame, like the appearance of minor characters in Nambyār's digressions, are purely local, the whole Naḷa story itself remains quite faithful to and dependent on its Sanskrit sources. It is quite clear that Nambyār, like the earlier *campu* and *kathakaḷi* authors, has cleaved closely to Śrīharṣa's ornate poem, the *Naiṣadhacarita*, rather than the Epic or other sources. The confinement of Nambyār's *Naḷacaritam tuḷḷal* to the "First Day," the correspondence of this plot coverage to the first half of Maḷamaṅgalam's *campu*, and Vāriyar's own "First Day" of his *kathakaḷi* play, all covering the whole of Śrīharṣa's great poem, confirm that reliance on this *mahākāvya* was the expected convention in this milieu of Kerala literary production.

There is no clearer evidence that Nambyār drew directly on the *Naiṣadhacarita* than his direct translation from that work of a seemingly trivial adornment to Naḷa's encounter with the swan-messenger. When Naḷa releases the swan that he has captured, Śrīharṣa lingers to describe in three verses how the swan preens its feathers, scratching its head with one foot, and using its bill to burrow into its feathers and remove the mites that were biting it [2.2; p.18]. Nambyār translates these lines, nearly verbatim, but out of the arcane vocabulary of Sanskrit into the entirely Dravidian vocabulary of local usage [137].

In contrast to this homely descriptive language, (whose semantics, but not language are taken directly from the Sanskrit), the swan then immediately launches into a verse in praise of Naḷa (Nambyār's own little composition, it seems) which is itself in pure Sanskrit, one of only two such passages in this work. Nambyār then, however, immediately glosses it into Malayalam, explaining at the end that "This is the meaning of the royal panegyric (*rāja-stuti*) that tallies with what the swan spoke"[137]. Nambyār is clearly at play here, with language and register, for he steals directly from high *kāvya*, hiding the sleight in rustic reportage, then he displays his own Sanskrit, providing an explicit gloss in his own poetic Malayalam, and announcing it as such.

A Swan's-eye View of Kerala

If Nambyār plays with the themes and words of Śrīharṣa, then he seems to do this with his own Kerala tradition, as well. Recalling that Maḷamaṅgalam had the swan plead with Naḷa that his body was not fleshy enough to be worth killing for food, Nambyār expands humorously on this idea:

> If you set aside the bones and skin and wings and beak, and pick through all this,
> Then there will be little or nothing to eat of my flesh in all this [136].

To continue in this wryly grim vein, Nambyār's swan is further quite

happy to save his own skin by directing Naḷa's attention to other kindred species:

If you have a taste for eating the flesh of birds you have killed,
Then there are plenty of roosters on this earth;
Eat them, and you'll be fully sated [136].

It is through this swan that Nambyār gives us the first of his extended asides on Kerala life, a literal bird's-eye view on the country and its inhabitants, as he wings his way to Damayanti with Naḷa's message of love. Passing over the countryside of houses and manors, he alights at a series of homes, and "Among those houses he saw a festival (*ghoṣam*) of foolishness, put on by numbers of Nāyars"[137]. The Nāyar were the caste of common soldiery, who likely provided the bulk of Nambyār's audience. Ideally bound by strict codes of honor that dedicated them to a life of disciplined martial service, their breakdown is for Nambyār symptomatic of the decline of the medieval order that embodies the Kali age in Kerala. Nayār are frequently shown in Nambyār's work as profligate, wenching, drunkards, opium addicts, and cowards who rage against weaklings, even as they flee battle, since they have frequently hocked their weapons to feed their vices. In this case, the swan witnesses several instances of Nāyar domestic scenes, in which Nāyar families are being brutalized by their intemperate heads.

At this final scene of a sequence he witnesses, the swan can only invoke the god's pity, ("saying Hara, Hara, Śiva!"), and fly on his way.

When a Nāyar afflicted with hunger comes [home]
And the rice has not been put to boil for his gruel
Enraged at hearing that, he goes,
And suddenly seizing his weapon, flings it into the forest.
Then all that scalding, seething water,
He pours over the heads of his children.
And with no consideration towards his wedded wife,
He seizes a cudgel and pummels her with that.
He smashes all the cauldrons and pitchers,

And hauling out the mortar, sinks it in the well.
The coconut scraper, he burns in the fire.
The grinding stone, he throws in the bathing tank.
And with that, his anger still not abated,
He continues to stalk around the yard [139].

The word I have translated "festival" (*ghoṣam*) that the swan uses several times for this show of pique is highly significant in Nambyār's work for its fan of related meanings and allied terms. Meaning literally something like "tumult" or "roar" or "din," it signifies both the clash of battle, and pomp of celebrations and martial parades. Closely allied to "festival" (*utsavam*) more properly, historian K.N. Gaṇeś has rightly highlighted festivals as sites of disorder and social upheaval in Nambyār's vision (Gaṇeś 1996:48–63; 208–34). Festivals in Kerala were religious events when temples and their environs might be thrown open to a wider audience, but they also might include various displays of ritualized competition and violence. Though not explicitly developed in his work, Gaṇeś's clear reading of the festival theme in a Bakhtinian sense of "carnival" is completely apt (Bakhtin 1984). Nambyār's works are themselves for performance in this festival milieu, and represent a venue for the critique of normal society that caters to those "Śūdras" at its lower fringes, when conventional norms were most open to sanctioned transgression.

As such, the theme of festivals is often reflexively invoked within Nambyār's works to display the Kerala public to itself; festivals within festivals. Indeed, after the wife-beating "*ghoṣam*" of the domestic sphere, Nambyār's swan flies over a temple in which a grand and actual religious festival (*mahā-utsava-ghoṣam*) is under way [139]. Here riotous assorted groups from Nambyār's Kerala abound: soldiers, wandering about with weapons, temple images lumbering on elephants, damsels decked out in silks and jewelry, Tamil Brahmins, their ladies, and various idle youth, all wandering in the din of kettle drums and exploding fireworks [139–40]. The potential violence just under the surface is brought out in an extended admonition of a conductor to his troop of temple drummers. They are warned that

if there are any slips in their keeping proper time in the festival of hoisting the god's flag, the quarrelsome assembly there may set on them and chop off their fingers [140]!

Festivals of Discontent

While the frame of Nambyār's *Naḷacaritam* is built around the romantic relations and encounters between Naḷa and Damayanti, including long passages in which the erotic themes predominate in an ornately Sanskritic mode, we can easily read the eruptions of Kerala's political economic order as a counterpoint, running against the grain of the mythological frame. For instance, when the divine sage, Nārada, goes to Indra's heaven, the king of the gods describes heaven in terms of its lacking all the vices of earth. There duties are not collected on goods, fines not levied, there homes are not sacked, prosperous folk not harassed, and the bazaars are not places where bribes, trickery, and extortion abound. The fiscal agents of the polity are there well-informed, judicious, bear malice towards none, and none against them, and intolerable modes of management are nowhere seen in the worlds of the gods [145]. Clearly the ideals of heaven are intended to highlight all the actual ills of Nambyār's Kerala by contrast.

Nārada's purpose in visiting Indra, however, is to use the romantic allure of Damayanti as the pretext for sparking confrontation between the gods and men. While this is a plot device deriving from the Epic, and played upon by Śrīharṣa, in Nambyār's perspective on society, the emphasis shifts from contention among the gods, to that among rival kings. As Nārada plots his purpose he thinks, "Through manipulating Indra, I will raise a great fight among these sundry lords of men"[145]. And indeed as Nambyār gathers these interstitial asides of contention in the margins of "festival," they come to push the plot in ways that deviated from his Sanskrit models and mark out the relative originality, if not incipient modernity of Nambyār's social vision.

Often it seems that a festive, martial hubris is the context for Nambyār voicing his complaints against the socio-political order.

One such instance in his *tuḷḷal* is the entry of Naḷa's great retinue of soldiers into Bhīma's capital of Kuṇḍina, jostling with the troops of rival kings as they arrive for Damayanti's *svayamvaram*. After describing their weapons, insignia, vehicles and tumult, one of Naḷa's soldiers addresses his fellows in a long monologue. He wants ostensibly to know their minds, and secure their support for Naḷa as a worthy "lord of the three worlds," but then launches into a critique of other such putative "lords" (*ejamāmar*) and their profligate followers, by contrast. He tells of courtly schemers who undermine their lieges and each other, of hirelings whose loyalties are for sale, of putative sworn allies who cheat their comrades in arms, and of braggarts who swell in boasting of their valor, then scuttle for cover in the underbrush if it comes to an actual battle. We learn that soldiers have hocked their weapons for tobacco and opium and drink, and that anyone who merely looks the part of a lord can attract the following of such rabble. But as for Naḷa's troops, they should be brave and stalwart and upright, for their king would put such rabble in chains [149–150]. Here again, we see how Naḷa (like the "World Emperor," Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ, for whom the Kerala tale is told) serves as the ideal foil against which the reported, flawed world is held up for comparison.

One of the key thematic ills which Nambyār projects through his Naḷa tale is that of deception and false appearances; deception of others and the widespread mistrust this breeds, and the deception of oneself. The praise of Nambyār's own family deity, the Śiva of Kiḷḷikkuṟiśśimaṅgalam, that opens this work is as a deceiver of his own wife and the world at large. Indra is deceived by the archetypical Brahmin sage, Nārada, and Indra, in turn, decides to cheat and deceive Naḷa by making him their messenger. The gods attempt to deceive Damayanti by appearing as Naḷa, and the gods ultimately deceive themselves, through thinking by all these means that they can win Damayanti. What Nambyār does, however, is bring these themes of moral critique down from their mythical generality to his contemporary society and polity. Nambyār's life witnessed the demise of decrepit feudal regimes (which were formerly his patronage

base) and their forcible annexure into the modernly bureaucratizing, but still heavily militarist, Travancore state (Gaṇeś 1996, *passim*). Historians generally read in his work a sense of social dislocation, and a profound mistrust of both the earlier social order and its relict degeneracy, and the excesses of rootlessness in a new mercenary order that had not yet found popular moorings or support. We have seen the critique of mercenary soldiers and petty chieftains who lack the social and moral substance to back the identities they have taken on, and who compensate for this lack by projections of boasting and hubris that may fool others, but also lead them to deceive themselves.

Nambyār pursues this theme as well in altering earlier renderings of an important segment as developed by Śrīharṣa and pursued by other Kerala authors: the praise of all the kings and their respective virtues when they gather for Damayanti's *svayamvaram*. Śrīharṣa, drawing on the tradition of Sanskrit *kāvya*, devotes a whole chapter to elaborate detailing of the various fine attributes of the royal personages assembled to compete for the princess's hand [Canto 11; pp.156–76], and Maḷamaṅgalam and Vāriyar follow his lead in their treatment of the scene. The framing and the nature of this occasion are handled very differently in Nambyār, however, lending the scene a different social tenor, suggestive of different themes. In Śrīharṣa and others, king Bhīma feels abashed at the luster of all the dignitaries thronging his court, and prays to the gods in abject humility for aid in rendering them appropriate praise. The gods are gracious, and accordingly Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning and speech, is dispatched to help him. Taking on the guise of Damayanti's handmaiden, she publicly recites panegyrics on each successive king as they appear for consideration. By contrast, Nambyār, in continuance of the critique of his own times, has the kings swell with pride and recite their own praises, and thus dispenses with the prayer of Bhīma and Sarasvatī's role in answering it [159]. In Nambyār's hands, rather than reflecting the epic observance of hierarchical propriety and social decorum befitting genuinely heroic kings, this segment works to display the vainglorious and ultimately self-deceptive posturing of fools. By comparison with the renditions of our earlier Kerala

authors, the sequence is short and substitutes the recitation of praiseworthy attributes with evident bombast proclaimed by the kings themselves. The whole role and perception of kingship had obviously undergone demotion in Nambyār's social vision of his contemporary world.

The disorder of the Kali age reflected in Nambyār's times was not merely comedic, but reflected an age of crisis, characterized for much of the populace by violence, oppression, and militant instability. I earlier noted the Bakhtinian, carnivalesque themes of festival in Nambyār's work, and social analysts like James Scott have shown how frequently in world history the disorder of popular festival can lead to the eruption of discontent into actual violence (Scott 1990). Nambyār recognized this potential, which was sometimes actively expressed in ritualized violence associated with Kerala festivals, to such an extent that it reconfigured the final plotting of his *Naḷacaritam tuḷḷal.*

In most tellings of the story from the Epic onwards, the plot of the relatively self-contained story of Nala and Damayantī through their blissful union at the close of the *svayamvaram* finds it climactic crisis in the gods' disguising themselves as multiple Nalas, and Damayantī having to chose between them. Remarkably, in Nambyār this episode is completely elided, where he simply gives a Sanskrit verse and its Malayalam gloss to the effect that Damayanti chose Naḷa, just as goddesses in the past had chosen gods as their husbands [159]. The evident crisis in plot structure falls instead around the theme of erupting martial violence from the rival kings at the conclusion of this wedding festival.

Where Śrīharṣa, Maḷamaṅgalam, and Vāriyar all simply state that the defeated kings swallowed their pride and headed home once Damayanti had made her choice, Nambyār's kings seethe with discontent and threaten bloody violence. The din, tumult and militant display veer from the mode of festive display to deployment in attack. They remark among themselves that they have been cheated by Bhīma and Naḷa, and decide to set upon the kingdom, killing these two, and seizing Damayanti for their own by force of arms [160–61]. Where Vāriyar had earlier put very similar lines of mindless

intentions to violence in the mouths of demons setting out for the wedding, Nambyār has apparently adapted such words to chiefly rivals, uttering remarkably similar oaths. Again what is mythically general in earlier authors gains humanly social specificity in Nambyār's work, even as the mythical evaluation—that the unbridled competitive violence of Kerala's soldiery had become demonic—carried over into social critique.

To consolidate this message's application to Kerala society, this becomes the final occasion for a long digression in Nambyār's *Naḷacaritam*—the complaints of Nāyars in the ranks of these enemy kings. At their own level, these soldiers complain of their life circumstances, systems of kinship, marriage, and political economy. The kinship structures of their lineage manors (*taṟavāṭus*) have been undermined by the women marrying into them, leading to the squandering of lineage resources (against the matrilineal norms of kinship), so that they have ended up indebted. Some are without weapons, since they have had to pawn their swords to meet expenses. At the level of their military leaders, they are now in the employ of fools, for they would attack virtuous kings like Naḷa, unjustly, for the sake of seizing their lawfully wedded women. And what would all these kings propose to do with this one woman? Can they divide her up in pieces among themselves? [161]

At one level, these Nāyars' complaints obviously form a counterpoint to the earlier speech of a Nāyar in the ranks of Naḷa's troops which works to show the relative virtue of Naḷa and his forces as upholders of a dharmic order. At the more intimate level of narrating a Nāyar's family circumstances and holding it up to ridicule, this dialogue clearly mirrors, in its domestic breakdown and ties to an economy of indebtedness and debasement of its members, the similar verses from Maḻamaṅgalam taken from earlier *campus*, here transposed from the caste-context of Nampūtiri Brahmins to that of Nāyars. Here, as well, the debasement internal to one segment of society, which is held up to ridicule, can be seen to have external effects in generalized violence. The corrupt and violent are woven together in a tapestry of Nambyār's jocular cynicism.

Rituals of Alliance: Human and Divine

Bhīma learns of these violent hordes amassing to attack his kingdom, murder his chosen son-in-law, abduct and violate his daughter, and as he and Naḷa search their souls for a remedy, the goddess, Bhārati, appears with divine counsel for Naḷa [162]. Bhārati is another name for Sarasvatī, the goddess who placates the rival kings with praise to prevent their anger in the Sanskrit *kāvya* of Śrīharṣa, which is also followed by Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar. Here she arrives to quell these kings' anger after their offense, and she has clearly been transposed into this later slot by Nambyār in awareness of her role in earlier renditions. In Nambyār's treatment, however, she appears here only as an intermediary, for what she advises Naḷa is that he must worship another goddess to assuage his enemies' wrath. She explicitly states that where his heroism has proven fruitless, he must worship the deity Indrāṇi, wife of Indra, to set relations right with the enraged kings [162]. Following a *pūja* and recitation of a highly formal praise to Indrāṇi (which takes the structured format of a *kathakaḷi*-like song), this latter goddess indeed appears, and works inwardly on the rival kings to assuage their anger and make them see the injustice of their intended assault.

While there is no clear indication as to why Indrāṇi in particular should be worshipped, I might suggest some or all of the following. In Śrīharṣa's *kāvya* (which Nambyār knew intimately), Indrāṇi blesses the couple because Damayanti chose Naḷa, rather than her own husband, Indra, who had left her side in heaven to vie for this mere mortal in the *svayamvaram*. She and the other divine wives had indeed mocked the gods for their unseemly randiness at the time, and at this level, her blessing (and active intervention in Nambyār's telling) represents a kind of closure to the domestic-moral dislocations of the tale, and restoration of proper human-divine relations reflected in peaceful relations among men. At the level of mythical personae, Indrāṇi is the female counterpart and antidote to Indra, who causes much of the trouble in the first place. Within the Hindu pantheon, she is the chief wife of Indra, the old Vedic deity of warfare to whom south Indian festivals were archetypically

dedicated, and within Kerala, the actual goddesses given prominence in most temples were tutelary goddesses of warriors. In the more specifically tantric milieu that shaped Kerala's temple culture, Indrāṇi is also one of the Seven Mothers (*Sapta-Mātṛka*), who certainly represent the upgrading of local goddess cults of the warrior classes into wives of the Sanskritic deities. What these particular associations confirm, however, is just what Indrāṇi's functional role in Nambyār is stated to be by Sarasvatī: that her worship supplements through religious rites what Naḷa's valor (*dhīrata*) alone cannot secure; namely, peaceful political relations with rival chieftains.

While Sarasvatī in the earlier renditions, as the goddess of speech who secures good will through effusive praise, would seem to represent the divine projection of diplomacy, she is here supplanted by an earthier goddess controlled through ritual who works by magic directly on the enemies' minds. Bhīma is so impressed with the results that Indrāṇi brings that Nambyār tells us he institutes her regular worship [163].

Aside from the ritually worshipful aspect of all this, however, there is (as is often the case with Nambyār's *tuḷḷals*) a manifestly material dimension to establishing this alliance as well. Seemingly as the immediate follow-up to Indrāṇi's worship, Bhīma lavishly bestows a long list of valuables, including cash payments, on the kings who just before were setting on him to kill him. He tops this off by giving to each of them fair maidens from among Damayanti's retinue, "jewels of maidenhood, the equal of Damayanti," to be their consorts. Rejoicing, the kings take their loot and women and leave Bhīma's kingdom, so that he and Naḷa can celebrate the wedding as a festival (*utsavam*) with all due tumult (*kolāhalam*) and merriment [163].

From one perspective, the alliance here seems to consist merely in buying off one's adversaries who would otherwise be prone to looting and rape. This seems a darkly cynical view of political relations and their entanglement with marriage alliances (for which there is much evidence throughout Nambyār's works). On the other hand, however, this distribution of women and goods through the political economy is effected through a religious festival, as an act of worship, in the forum of the temple. At the level of the overt ideology of the

narrative, this is all part of the actual religious powers of the goddesses, Sarasvatī and Indrāṇi, accessed through their worship.

Finally, this embeddedness in ritual effectiveness ties reflexively through two levels of framing for the *tuḷḷal*. Within the text itself, recall that the whole story is the content of a ritual recitation to Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ to vanquish the ills of the Kali age afflicting his Kerala kingdom, all set in some unspecified, yet putatively real regional past. We have seen that the coda to the *Naḷacaritam tuḷḷal* affirms that this was indeed successful in securing all good for the Perumāḷ and his descendants. The second level of framing, which is more implicitly contextual, draws on this first level as exemplification of the general effect of all particular performances of *tuḷḷals*, which always functioned as religiously sponsored events, ritual performances that were themselves parts of festivals conducted in the environs of temples. But as the content of the tale itself illustrates, and buttresses through tying its remotely mythical personae into Kerala-specific identities, the power of ritual lies not merely in the agency of gods, but also in the politics of performance which Nambyār's works held up to scrutiny in the ironic reflexivity of the carnivalsque.

Conclusion: Naḷa in Kerala

Despite the wishes of some Kerala devotees of Naḷa, I would argue that until the promotion of Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar's *kathakaḷi* script, *Naḷacaritam*, to the status of great Malayalam literature in the early decades of the twentieth century, the Naḷa story did not enjoy wide popularity in Kerala. Compared to the tales and performances around many other deities, demons, and heroes, both Sanskritic and Dravidian, Naḷa never became indigenized, and his narrative had only limited circulation in the relatively elite circles of the temple arts. Commensurate with this, we have seen how these three most prominent versions of the tale remained closely dependent on original Sanskrit sources, and particularly how Śrīharṣa's *mahākāvya*, *Naiṣadhacarita*, was the model for its aesthetic and narrative figurement across these three different genres.

Within these genres themselves, however, I have tried to show how the twin contexts of the temple performance and its socio-political conditions worked through framings and insertions to render the story locally relevant, while leaving its characters and basic emplotment in overall textual conformity with their Sanskrit exemplars. We have seen how the three different genres had their own distinctive linguistic, poetic and performative conventions that shaped their particular realizations of the Naḷa tale, and that these were tied to the caste identities and entitlements of the respective authors, performers, and audiences associated with each genre. Despite these slightly different artistic strategies and constituencies, however, these works were all oriented to the bloc of upper-caste (*savarṇṇa*) audiences in the context of religiously ritual celebrations in the environs of caste-exclusive temples. It is for this reason that we find clear cross-genre linkages between the works, with reference to their common socio-political and religious milieu and to their shared ways of drawing on common Sanskrit sources for the Naḷa narrative.

Aside from the particular indexical linkages to their contexts of performance, the most general level of shared context between these texts is that they were all crafted for performance as religiously effective ritual enactments. They were thus all framed so that what the "insides" of the texts exemplify—aesthetically, narratively, and ritually—applied to the "outsides" of the texts—the ritual motivations of the audience in the wider context of Kerala society. It is in this way that Naḷa is projected as the yearned-for center of a stable socio-moral and political order, and that Kali is objectified as the demoniacal forces of fractious disorder that possess and disable that center from within and without. The response to such conflict in medieval Kerala was to periodically and publicly reassert a ritual order that combined the religious exorcism of demonic "others" with the religious celebration of armed dominance over rival and subordinated sectors of society. Such occasions, which could themselves be times of fractious display and renegotiation, most conspicuously included religious festivals. It was just such festivals for which these text-performances were authored, and in which the partly martial, partly magical solution to Naḷa's affliction projected

the hopeful outcome of ritual enactment for the sponsors and worshipful audiences of these temple arts.

★ ★ ★

As an interesting postscript, we may note how the life of Naḷa continues in Kerala around Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar's *kathakaḷi* play and the problems that still beset its literary-performative interpretation. After some seven major Malayalam commentaries spread over the last century would have seemed to exhaust the exegetical possibilities in Vāriyar's work, a new 616–page commentarial edition of the *Naḷacaritam* was recently brought out by a major Kerala publisher (Nāyar 2001).[24] In the long editorial introduction, the commentator, a Malayalam professor, attacks the tradition of staging only selected scenes from the play that has developed under the state-sponsored center for performing temple arts, Kerala Kalamandalam. Arguing through ad hominem attacks that pedestrian actors and managers have threatened to destroy what he sees as the primarily *rasa*-based genius of *kathakaḷi*, best exemplified through the complexities of *Naḷacaritam*, he has been roundly counter-attacked in the reviews for his effetely literary understanding of *kathakaḷi*, especially by those who perform in, or are associated with Kalamandalam and its lineage (Kaṇṇan 2001; Nārāyaṇan 2001).

After generations of study and performance, we can see that a root problem with Vāriyar's *Naḷacaritam* still remains: its writerly aesthetics, which made it great "literature" under the print capitalism and public schooling of the modern state, still seem in partial conflict with the ethos and sensibilities of *kathakaḷi*'s actual practice. Since, historically, many of the scenes apparently did not find widespread favor in the lineage-gymnasia where *kathakaḷi* staging was traditionally studied and reproduced, the transmission of this staging has been spotty, and necessarily reinvented when scenes are requested that earlier generations let lapse.

Ramachandran Nair's recommendation to rescue this play and the whole tradition from its putatively philistine custodians is to

convene a body of aesthetically qualified literati to produce a new, comprehensive, and "official" staging manual for the entirety of the *Naḷacaritam*. So far as I am aware, there has been no headlong rush to embrace this scheme, and the whole nature and forum of the debate only serves to underscore my general characterization of the fundamentally elitist field of Sanskrit production where Naḷa had his birth in Kerala, and of the rarified atmosphere of scholarly aesthetics he continues to breathe. Today the hero Naḷa struggles to maintain his only performative representation in modern Kerala as the archaic and exotic character of *kathakaḷi*. In green face-paint and ruffled skirts he makes a sporadic appearance: in a few officially sponsored educational venues; before the thin and aging audiences of some urban arts' clubs; as an occasional offering in temple festivals; and in canned snippets aired briefly for the quickly bored audiences of local television or foreign tourist venues. Nala's only secure foothold is as textual artifact, enshrined as a canonical piece of "classical" Malayalam literature in the musings of scholars and on the syllabuses of their students.

Notes

1. The analytic approaches I have synthesized for application to these materials draw heavily on recent and important linguistic anthropological theory: on the conjointly textual and social character of genre, see Hanks 1987; on the multistratal relations between text and context, Goodwin and Duranti 1992; and on the processural nature of entextualization as a complex dynamic, see Bauman and Briggs 1990.
2. The characterizations of medieval Kerala's literature, society, and temple culture that follow draw on many years of fieldwork, and the study of mostly Malayalam and scattered colonial and historical sources that I will not attempt to document here. One might consult some of the anthropological sources in English such as Gough 1961, Mencher and Goldberg 1967, and Fuller 1976.
3. I thank David Shulman (personal correspondence) for inviting me to clarify my position here. The projected polarity between the categories

Sanskrit and Dravidian reflects local, normative discourse, rather than informing my own substantive analysis for which I try to resort to the "facts" of linguistics, anthropology, and history, as I read them. On the other hand, the categorical distinction was an indigenous, historically grounded norm that Kerala pundits themselves deployed in the fourteenth century, when they argued their own "Dravidian-ness" (*dramiḍa-tva*) in terms that were not merely linguistic, but also explicitly related to distinctively south Indian religious and political cultural systems (Freeman 1998). In light of current language-theory, we would indeed expect such a projected language division not to be merely linguistic, but to be expressive of wider socio-cultural differences. All such language ideologies, of course, simplify and mask continua and struggles of both linguisitic and other kinds, and I have elsewhere charted something of the actual asymmetries and complexities, both normative and pragmatic, that the development of Malayalam literature (Freeman 2002) and Hinduism in Kerala (Freeman 2003) entailed in this regard. Specific to the analyses of this paper, I will simply state, along these lines, that the resort to Sanskrit—linguistically, literarily, and culturally—had the localized effect of operating a set of distinctions against both the regional language of Kerala, and the language culture of non-Brahmanical castes, and of evoking complex responses, in turn. These differences operated with local, cultural, and therefore historically traceable effects through the literature, independently of how modern analysts might or might not wish to use Sanskrit and Dravidian as categories of linguistic and/or cultural analysis for comparison at a pan-Indic level.

4. A study in Malayalam (Prasannamaṇi 1986) makes perhaps the most robust case possible for the Nala tale being "popular" in Kerala; however, it seems quite clear that most of these minor texts (for which he had to search quite hard) were of high-caste authorship and circulation, as for the *Brāhmaṇi pāṭṭus* that Maḷamaṅgalam wrote, or the *Naḷacaritam kiḷippāṭṭu* (perhaps of Kuñcan Nambyār), mentioned below. Prasannamaṇi, in fact, ends up focusing the bulk of his study on the three elite works that I treat in this essay, clearly the really significant works on Nala in Malayalam.
5. I refer here to the *Cilappatikāram*, *Maṇimekalai*, and *Cīvikacintāmaṇi*, which Zvelebil considers as broadly "epic" poems (1974, 128–29), but which categorization Shulman (personal communication) considers problematic.

6. Nearly six hundred borrowed verses in Punam's *Bhāṣā Rāmāyaṇa Campu*, discussed below, taken from previous Sanskrit works are given in Veṅkiṭṭarāma Śarmma (1967, Appendix ii.A.). The dozens of borrowings of one of our main Naḷa authors, Maḷamaṅgalam, across his own *campus* are given in P. Padmanabhamenon's introdution to our edition of that work (Maḷamaṅgalam 1967 [1934]: xxxiii-iv).
7. I owe the impetus for this section of the paper to David Shulman, who rightly pushed me to expand my characterization of Maḷamaṅgalam's work with some substantive exemplification. Citations are to Maḷamaṅgalam (1967 [1934]), where the first number signifies the first or second half of the work, the second, the verse or prose (*gadyam*) number therein.
8. There is a complete English translation of this work, under the title *Naiṣadhacarita* (Śrīharṣa 1965). I will make citations to this edition by "canto" and page. The work is also known under the title *Naiṣadhīya-caritam*, as in the Sanskrit edition I have used (Śrīharṣa 1986).
9. These borrowings of Punam are listed in Veṅkiṭṭarāma Śarmma (1967, Appendix ii.A.). The verse borrowed by Maḷamaṅgalam from Punam is in the work's first half (*pūrva-bhāgam*), verse 87 (Maḷamaṅgalam 1967 [1934]) = Punam's *Sītāsvayamvaram* chapter, verse 29 (Veṅkiṭṭarāma Śarmma 1967, 189).
10. David Shulman (personal correspondence) has advised me that the bird in the Nala narrative is not a swan, but a goose. The various names and descriptions used among the different texts, commentaries and Sanskrit lexicographers, do not seem helpful or consistent in either agreeing with each other or in identifying an actual bird that matches up with ornithological descriptions (e.g., Padmanabha Menon's comment on vs. 43 and lexicons cited thereon, Maḷamaṅgalam 1967 [1934]:189). This is in keeping with uses in modern Indian languages for some of the same words to cover everything from swans, to geese, to flamingos, to ducks. The major species of swans do winter in India, and are white, in keeping with the broad consensus of commentators, and in contrast to the commoner geese. Given the fabulous nature of this creature, in any case, I have therefore left my translation in keeping with the general contemporary Indian convention of calling it a "swan."
11. For the following citations from the Sanskrit, I follow the numbering of the Critical Edition (Sukthankar 1942). I follow this numbering with the pages of van Buitenen's translation for consultation (van

Buitenen 1975), though I rely on my own translations and construal of the original unless otherwise specified.

12. Citations are to the English translation (Śrīharṣa 1965), given by canto and verse numbers, followed by page number.
13. This spelling is widespread throughout south India, even in Sanskrit works, such as the manuscripts of the *Mahābhārata*, where the story first appears (Sukthankar 1942:165 n.1).
14. See for instance the earliest of the old *campu*s, the thirteenth-century *Uṇṇiyaccicaritam*, *gadyam* 1 (Nāyar 1990:9–11).
15. Cf. *Uṇṇiyaccicaritam*, *gadyam* 9 (Nāyar 1990:69–72).
16. I have added the cautionary qualifiers "dominant" and "putative" here in response to David Shulman's objection (personal communication) that he views *rasa* as a primarily theoretical, punditic construct of post-hoc commentarial analysis, rather than the guiding principle of good Sanskrit artistic production. While I agree that *rasa*-theory is normative, and always exists in a problematic relation to the pragmatics of poetic production, as theory, *rasa* was hegemonic in Kerala from the time of Abhinavagupta (eleventh century), and the world of Sanskritic production in this context assumed it as the *sine qua non* of any poetic venture. Indeed the first verse of the *Naḷacaritam*, discussed below, explicitly invokes it, just as the verses from Maḷamaṅgalam on erotic longing, cited earlier, presuppose it as their framework of interpretation.
17. As translated in van Buitenen 1975, 364.
18. As explained above, the various "readings" as to scenes, method of reckoning and numbering verses, etc. of Vāriyar's *Naḷacaritam* make it very difficult to cite consistently across editions. I have accordingly chosen to use only page numbers to the text from Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar 1962. All translations are my own, but for comparison I have also given page numbers to the only complete English translation when I originally wrote this paper (Warrier 1977). Since then, a more elegant (though occasionally misleading) translation has appeared, accompanied by a modern performance manual (Gopalakrishnan 2001).
19. Nāyar (1987) has devoted a whole study to documenting all of the direct and indirect influences and adaptions from Śrīharṣa's *kāvya* into Vāriyar's *kathakaḷi*.
20. While the *kiḷippāṭṭu* is usually thought of as a "popular" genre, it is rather difficult to view the *Naḷacaritam Kiḷippāṭṭu* as such (Anonymous 1951). It certainly has very much in common with Kuñcan Nambyār's

tuḷḷal work on Naḷa, as many have noted, and seems far more the attempt of a learned scholar to use this form, rather than any sort of "folk" effort.

21. Since the line numbers vary across editions, I have chosen that of Śarma (1976), and will cite the *Naḷacaritam tuḷḷal* only by page numbers from there.
22. Gaṇeś does suggest that this folk memory may have been inspired by the great Ravi Varma Kulaśekhara of the early fourteenth century, but not that there is any positive historical content to this association.
23. These lines have actually been transposed to the end of the *tuḷḷal* titled *Rukmiṇīsvayamvaram* in most editions, though they are recognized as belonging properly to the Naḷa frame story (Śarma 1976:202 and Note 1).
24. This work became available only after my completion of this paper, and by coincidence, the author has taken up the same scene between Naḷa and the swan for comparison with Śrīharṣa's *kāvya*, as I have. While his exposition is more painstaking and elaborate, and his sights more singularly set on lauding Vāriyar's genius, the substantive findings of Vāriyar's reliance on the earlier *kāvya* confirm my own.

Nala's Weakness and Damayanti's Powers: Jain Tellings of the Great Love Story*

M. Whitney Kelting

The classic love story of Nala and Damayanti presents Jain authors with the challenge of balancing the Jain call for passionlessness and renunciation against the passionate attachment between Nala and Damayanti. Jain versions are remarkably similar to each other in that they all carry the clear stamp of Jain values. Though the Nala and Damayanti story is found within the corpus of narrative literature of each of the major Jain sects, this chapter centers around the propagation of the story within the most populous sectarian community, the Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak, and mostly by authors from the Tapā Gacch, the largest monastic lineage.[1] This community has also been the most studied and therefore provides the widest array and most comprehensive collection of available materials to examine. (See Appendix for a discussion of Jain writings on Nala and Damayanti.)

What is perhaps most striking in Jain accounts of the Nala and Damayanti narrative is the focus on Damayanti. Modern tellings of the Nala and Damayanti story appear most commonly in collections of *satī* (virtuous women) narratives; Jains reckon Damayanti a Jain

*This article is based in part on research conducted under the auspices of an American Institute of Indian Studies Senior Fellowship in 2001. I wish to thank John Cort, Paul Dundas, Sherry Fohr, Steve Heim, Steve Runge, and Alok Shah for assistance in researching and writing this article, and Joyce Flueckiger for inviting me to contribute to this volume.

satī and include her in most *satī* lists and narrative collections. The tale, of course, tells the story of Nala as well, and it is Nala's weakness which propels much of the narrative action. More important, though, it is Damayanti's magical powers and virtue that save the day. Nala is usually a foil for Damayanti as he sets into motion the story which allows Damayanti to display her virtue and power. His acts, then, are needed to demonstrate Damayanti's virtue rather than his own.

Jain versions would be recognizable to those familiar with the telling in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* in spite of including Jain cosmology, the centrality of karma, Jain practices, monks and renunciation. Though similar in structure and narrative action, many of the episodes or details from the *Mahābhārata* version so familiar and central to the Nala and Damayanti story (for example, the match-making geese, the duplicate Nalas, and the riddle) are not a part of the Jain versions. Even the familiar "special food" of Nala and the forehead mark of Damayanti take a different form in the Jain versions. Two features which Jains regularly remarked on whenever I asked about Nala and Damayanti were his ability to cook by the light of the sun (thereby avoiding the sin of lighting a fire) and her forehead mark which could dispel all darkness; these two central features of the Jain narrative are missing in the Hindu versions. In the Hindu versions, the mark on Damayanti's forehead which proves her distinctiveness is an omen, not a magical power, and Nala's ability to cook special food is a gift of the gods and does not conform to Jain ethics (being both non-vegetarian and flame-broiled).

Nala and Damayanti in Jain Cosmology

Jain puranic literature centers on the lives of sixty-three illustrious men (*śālaka puruṣa*) who illuminate the religion (Cort 1993:188; Jaini 1993:209).[2] There are additional virtuous men (*mahāsatas*) most of whom are monks who protected the Jain religion. Likewise Jains have collectivities of virtuous women (*satīs*). Nala, interestingly, does not appear in any of the Jain lists of virtuous or illustrious men, but he is one of the twenty-four *kāmadevas*, among who are

included a few characters well known to Hindus: Nala, Hanuman, Baliraj (Vali) and Vasudev (the father of Krishna and Balarama). *Kāmadevas* are known for their exceptional beauty, for their ability to use their charms to achieve good things, and sometimes for their amorous conquests. However, Jain narratives about the *kāmadevas* focus on them as examples of man's weakness and the vicissitudes of fortune (Caudhari 1973:132). In the end, the *kāmadevas* do achieve liberation but not necessarily in this lifetime; however, since they often show an excess of emotion, they are not usually seen as role models for behavior the way that the illustrious men, the great Jain kings or even the great merchant-leaders are cited in sermons as examples to be emulated. Only four *kāmadevas* transcend this status and are known by their more virtuous identities: Sanatkumar, who is a universal ruler (*cakravartin*) and the three Jinas: Santi, Kuthu and Ara. These four are included in the collections of the illustrious men, and the Jinas, of course, have fairly extensive biographies. A further eleven *kāmadevas* have their stories told independently, but the two with the greatest number of tellings are Bahubali and Nala.[3] Because of his association with the first Jina, Rsabha, and the first *cakravartin*, Bharat, Bahubali's is the most widely found narrative of a *kāmadeva*. Nala comes second for numbers of independent tellings (Caudhari 1973:136–37). Bahubali, who ultimately rejects worldly life, becomes the paradigmatic monk for the Digambar tradition while Nala, who likewise renounces worldly life, fails to be the ideal monk and instead illustrates the path of human frailty.

Damayanti has a more clearly virtuous position as a Jain *satī*. Damayanti's significance must be contextualized within the Jain understanding of *satīs* as models of particular virtue for women and of the collectivities of these *satīs* standing in for the collectivity of women's virtue (Kelting 2006:194). These collectivities have at their base the lists of *satī* names which are recited as part of Jain ritual practices, primarily to create an auspicious atmosphere in which to perform another ritual or to start the day (*māngalik*). Damayanti's name appears in every *satī* list I have encountered. Prayers like the

"*Soḷ Satī nī Stūti*" (Praises of the Sixteen *Satīs*) below include Damayanti in a list of names of auspicious and virtuous women:

> Brahmi, Candanbalika, Bhagavati Rajimati, Draupadi,
> Kausalya and Mrgavati and Sulasa, Sita, Subhadra, Siva;
> Kunti, Silavati, Nalah's Damayanti, Cula, and Prabhavati,
> Padmavati and Sundari. May this auspiciousness be performed
> every day.
>
> (*Jina Śāsananam Śrāmanīratno* 1994:121)

In the *Bhārahesara nī Sajjhāy* list, there is a list of fifty-three virtuous men (*mahāpuruṣa*), which is followed by a list of forty-seven women referred to as *satīs* at the close of the text. This text serves as the root text for the collection of narratives, Subhasilaganivir's *Bhārateśvara Bahubali Vṛttiḥ*, from which many *satī* narratives seem to draw their initial form and details. Damayanti's name appears in the first line of the list of *satīs*:

> Sulasa, Candanbala, Manorama, Madanrekha, Damayanti;
> Narmadasundari, Sita, Nanda, Bhadra, and Subhadra (8).
>
> (*Śrī Pānca Pratikramaṇ Sūtra*, n.d., 21)

The Jain absorption of virtuous women from Hindu narratives is evident in these lists: Kausalya, Sita, Kunti, Draupadi, and also in the longer lists the queens of Krishna appear. Jain lists do not, however, include all the Hindu virtuous women; for example, they never include Madri or the even more problematic Padmini.

The *Soḷ Satī no Chānd* (Sixteen *Satī Chānd*) includes a brief almost cryptic verse for each of the *satīs* named in the *Soḷ Satī nī Stūti* above and serves as the root text for the contemporary narrative collection called *Soḷ Mahāsatiyo* (The Sixteen Great *Satīs*). In the *Soḷ Satī no Chānd*, the Jain story of Nala and Damayanti is cast in as brief a statement as we can find:

> In Nilidha city, Nalah's wish fulfiller, Damayanti, was his wife.
> Troubled, she protected her chastity, illuminating the three worlds.
>
> (*Śrī Sudhāras Stāvan Sangrah*, n.d., 89)[4]

The narrative summed up by the adjective "troubled" serves to contextualize Damayanti's virtue: "she protected her chastity." The results of her chastity—"illuminating the three worlds"—alludes to one of her magical powers (to illuminate all with the radiance that beams from her forehead mark) while also invoking the trope of illuminating the three worlds associated with the moment that a Jina achieves omniscience, at which time the three worlds (heavens, earth, and hells) are illuminated. In these lists, we do not hear the narratives, but rather the *satī*'s name stands in indexically for the narrative which the reader is assumed to know.

Damayanti's narrative also conforms to the values and structure of Jain *satī* narratives. These tell of the women's miraculous abilities, some inborn and some arising out of their virtue, of the testing of their virtue and religious fortitude, and of the *satī*'s ultimate victory manifesting itself in a return to social order and the recognition of her superior virtue. In this, Jain *satī* narratives are similar to Hindu *satī* narratives with the key differences being the Jain focus on renunciation and the rejection of the rite of dying with one's husband. Jain *satīs* must balance being devoted wives against the higher goal of renunciation. While some Jain *satīs* conform to the *pativratā* norm of devotion to their husbands, many become nuns either by rejecting marriage altogether or renouncing their marital status. Some *satīs* renounce along with their husbands, which mirrors the Hindu model of following a husband into death (Kelting 2009). Damayanti's first request for renunciation is rejected because she has more "wife" karma left and her second request happens alongside Nala's. This suggests that in her story renunciation cannot include the rejection of her husband, Nala, without disrupting the grammar, of the Nala and Damayanti story.

Overtly Jain Aspects

The Jain versions of the Nala and Damayanti story share a few specific features which differentiate them from the version in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: the centrality of karma, Jain practices and renunciation. In a way that is typical of Jain didactic narratives, one

major focus is on karma as the reason for particular skills and talents. For example, Damayanti's giving golden *tilaks* to the Jinas images in a past life results in her being born with the shining *tilak* on her own forehead in this lifetime (Bender 1951:331). An extension of these karma-based explanations is that the story is seen not as the result of machinations of deities (particularly the jealous Kali, as in the *Mahābhārata*) but as arising out of karmic histories. Nala and Damayanti are separated for twelve years because in a previous life the couple prevented a Jain monk from collecting alms for twelve hours. The absence of the deities and their involvement leaves the story's action in human hands, with Nala suffering for a mistake of his own doing. Further, he has fewer powers: the secret of horses and how to cook by the rays of the sun. Also in the Jain narratives, the story of Nala and Damayanti is told alongside the stories (though shorter) of their other births as a couple. Thus the Nala and Damayanti story is only one episode, though the most important, in the longer history of two souls who achieve liberation later.

The Nala and Damayanti story includes repeated instances of the main characters performing Jain rituals as an indicator of their status as good Jains. Damayanti is described in all of the tellings as a devout Jain who worships an image of the sixteenth Jina, Santinath, given to Damayanti by the guardian goddess (Nivrtidevi) (Dhami 1998:33). Damayanti performs many Jain fasts breaking them only with fruit that has fallen from the tree. In a past life, Damayanti (as Virmati) had completed five hundred fasts—while some texts say these were water-only fasts, others claim a kind of one-sitting fast of bland food called *āyambil*. Heroic fasting leads to her rebirth as Damayanti, the wife of Nala. Fasting is part and parcel of the ideal dedicated wife's religious obligation which proves a woman's virtue (Reynell 1991:64) and Damayanti demonstrates her superior virtue and fortitude by performing heroic fasting. Damayanti's piety also leads her to seek out the company of other Jains for protection; it is often written that Damayanti agrees to travel with the second caravan because she overhears one of its members reciting the Navkār Mantra.

In addition, Damayanti thrice uses the power of the Navkār Mantra to achieve spectacular (if not, miraculous) results. In

Rsivardhanasuri's telling, after the *svayamvara*, Krishna gets angry with Nala for being chosen and attacks him. Damayanti takes some water in her hand, says the name of the Jinas, and sprinkles it on Nala and Krishna, breaking up the fight (Bender 1951:333). In Somaprabhasuri's telling, when Damayanti is grabbed by a crocodile, she recites the Navkār Mantra and is freed (Granoff 1998:202). In another episode, the god Kusumaprabha tells Damayanti that when he was a snake in his previous life he tried to threaten her, but she was protected because she recited the Navkār Mantra. Later, he heard Damayanti teaching some Hindu ascetics and he realized the error of his ways. Feeling disgust for his snake life, he fasted to death and was reborn as a god (Johnson 1962:122). The miraculous properties of the Navkār Mantra are included in most Jain narratives and are widely believed in contemporary Jain practice; these episodes set the Nala and Damayanti story firmly in the context of Jain practice and belief.

The Nala and Damayanti story offers opportunities for the glorification of Jain values. One virtue of Nala's sun-cooked food is that it does not require the lighting of a fire, which Jains believe causes harm to both fire-bodies and those beings who live in the wood or are attracted to the light of the flames. In addition, the special food is not meat—as it is in the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* (van Buitenen 1975:358)—because, if it were, then none of our main characters could taste the food without calling into question the vegetarianism which Jain texts extend to all good people (Dundas 2000). When Nala is given a boon after feeding his sun-cooked food to king Dadhipara, he asks the king to ban hunting and alcohol in his kingdom (Tawney 1895:221). Jain versions also include many speeches, given primarily by Damayanti, which explain Jain doctrine and the benefits of following it alongside exemplary behavior intended to inspire other characters in the narrative and, doubtless, the audience of the story.

Finally, Jain tellings also include Jain mendicants and Jain practices as an integral part of the life experience of ideal Jains. Nala and Damayanti take ordination as Jain mendicants, which I will discuss later. In the Nala and Damayanti story, as compared to many Jain narratives, mendicants play fairly subsidiary roles. That

said, throughout the narratives, Damayanti meets mendicants—many of whom attribute their conversion to Jainism to having witnessed her piety—and she solicits advice from several about how to maintain her faith. In a widely told episode, Damayanti's lectures and austere example are credited with the mass conversion of five hundred Hindu ascetics who become Jain monks when the great monk Yasobhadra passes (Bender 1952:336; Dhami 1998:57; Sri Virat 1992–93:5). In addition to converting others, Nala and Damayanti themselves pay obesience to several Jain monks, learn about their past lives from a Jain monk, and ultimately take ordination themselves. Throughout the Jain versions, though rarely central to the action, monks are key agents of instruction and objects of ongoing devotion.

Damayanti's Miraculous Powers

It is Damayanti who performs most of the miracles in the Jain versions of the Nala and Damayanti story and her powers arise out of both past acts and her present chastity. In Hemacandra's version, she lights up the forest with the light emanating from her forehead mark, she scares off the thieves who attack the caravan with her great shout, she brings water to a stream by invoking her chastity, she stops fights by reciting a mantra and sprinkling the fighters with water, and her conduct also leads to the conversion of many who interact with her including the community of Hindu ascetic Brahmins and the members of the caravans. Damayanti's miracles are highlighted by the diminished focus on Nala's miracles. Yes, Nala can get to the second (fake) *svayamvara* because he knows the secret of horses, and Damayanti knows it is probably Nala because he can cook with the rays of the sun, but in the Jain versions, Nala does not control the elements: fire, water and others. Interestingly, while contemporary Jains always made a point of highlighting that Nala could cook with the rays of the sun, this feature of the story is never explained or highlighted beyond its role as a means of identifying Nala.

In Jain versions, Nala's birth is described briefly, while Damayanti's birth merits a detailed and lengthy description. Her conception is

heralded with an auspicious dream of a white elephant entering the house to escape a fire, which the king interprets as a sign of the conception of a baby of exceeding merit (Johnson 1962:97). Damayanti's birth leads to an increase in Bhima's strength and wealth. This mirrors nicely the well-known story of the birth of Mahavir, whose conception, like that of all universal teachers, is marked by fourteen auspicious dreams and whose gestation and birth lead to an increase in his father's kingdom. As an only child (there is no mention of brothers in the Jain tellings), Damayanti is given the best education. She is trained in all the arts and also in the details of the Jain religion (Johnson 1962:98–99). This is a far cry from the Damayanti of the *Mahābhārata*, who at birth is noted exclusively for her beauty (van Buitenen 1975:323) and later her chastity.

Damayanti has powers that arise out of her karma from past good acts. As mentioned earlier, the two most significant are her shining forehead mark (*tilak*) and her shout. The mark on Damayanti's forehead is attributed to her donation of golden *tilaks* to Jain images in a past life: "Through the miraculous result of her meritorious deed in the previous [birth] (in putting *tilakas* on Jina-images), there appeared on her forehead a mark which shone all her life and dazzled the world as does the sun" (Bender 1951:331). The forehead mark is described as a mark of virtue (*śrīvatsa*) and compared to one of the bodily signs of a Jina: "She was born with a beauty mark on her forehead, radiant like the orb of the sun, like the auspicious mark that is said to adorn the chest of great men" (Granoff 1998:178).[5] Damayanti's forehead mark is also the sign which her aunt uses to authenticate Damayanti's identity: "'Forgive me that I did not recognize you. But where is the beauty mark on your forehead with its radiant glow?' And as she asked this, Candajasa used her own saliva to wipe Damayanti's forehead. The mark on Damayanti's forehead began to shine, like the sun released from the clouds, like a lump of gold just taken out of the fire" (Granoff 1998:206). But the forehead mark is not only to look at as a sign of Damayanti's identity, and a mark of virtue; it can also serve as a beacon which dispels the darkness. When their wedding party is plunged into darkness and

the army has lost its way, Nala wakes Damayanti: "'Queen! Wake up! Let shine the light from the sun-like mark on your forehead, for my entire army is blind in this darkness and can go no further.' Damayanti got up and rubbed her forehead with her hand. Her beauty mark, home to dazzling rays, shone brightly, destroying the darkness. The army then proceeded along the road without any obstacles" (Granoff 1998:183). Her generosity and the fast which preceeded the *tilak* donation result in her glowing forehead mark, which both proves her past virtue and protects those whom she favors.

Damayanti is also blessed with a shout which scares off evil people; though I found no accounts of where or why Damayanti got her powerful shout. In the Jain versions, Damayanti twice uses her shout to defend the the men she is with—Nala and the caravanserai, respectively. Hemacandra describes the power of her shout: "The bandits fled when shouts, by which the forest was deafened, were heard, like crows at the sound of a bow" (Johnson 1962:116). In the first instance when Damayanti uses her shout, she does so in order to protect Nala. In Hemacandra's telling, after the Bhils attack her and Nala, Damayanti tells Nala that killing the Bhils is beneath him and his sword and she gives her shout: "'Naisdhi's sword, the abode of the Sri of victory over half of Bharata, will be shamed by being employed against these cattle.' After saying this Bhima's daughter gave menacing shouts repeatedly, like a sorceress in a circle, to accomplish her wishes. These menacing shouts given by Bhaimi [Damayanti] became sharp iron needles when they entered the Bhilla's ears by her power" (Johnson 1962:111). Later, as she is wandering alone through the jungle, Damayanti spies a caravan being attacked by robbers. "Damayanti cried out, 'Do not be afraid,' and she shouted at the thieves, 'You wicked men! Do not attempt to loot this caravan which is under my protection! If you do you will suffer the consequences.' But that did not stop the thieves. And so she let out a loud cry into which she had infused all the power of her chastity. At that the thieves dispersed like a flock of crows at the sound of the twang of a bowstring" (Granoff 1998:195). In both cases Damayanti's shout scares off the

attackers. In Somaprabhasuri's telling, her shout is made even more powerful through her chastity. The strength of her virtue is fueled by her chastity (*śīl*) which then augments her power.

Damayanti's Chastity

Jains tell Damayanti's story in ways that maximize their understanding of her chastity and exclude any episodes which might imply that Damayanti is not perfectly chaste. For example, the episode of the matchmaking geese is absent; Damayanti knows nothing of Nala before the *svayamvara*. Nala has, of course, heard of Damayanti's beauty and intelligence but so have all the kings and princes. Damayanti chooses Nala from the group of kings and princes without the challenge of the "duplicate" Nalas which in non-Jain versions demonstrates her partiality and prior knowledge of Nala. From the moment of her choice of Nala, she looks no further.

Damayanti is recognized by everyone as the perfect chaste wife. When Kubara wants to keep Damayanti for himself, his advisors warn him to let her go: "If you do it by force, the chaste one with her curse will reduce you to dust; for nothing is difficult for chaste women" (Tawney 1895:202). Here the Jain version uses the trope of the *satī*'s curse to announce Damayanti's *satī* status and to make it clear that Jain *satīs* are as powerful as Hindu ones. Nala accepts his wife's devotion and idealizes her as the perfect woman. Damayanti's speech explaining why she must follow him to the forest is accepted as proof of her status as a dedicated wife. As Nala is leaving Damayanti in the jungle, he thinks: "Nothing will happen to Damayamti; she will be protected by her chastity. Their virtuous conduct, a suit of armor covering every limb, protects chaste women" (Granoff 1998:191). Each of the tropes of the chaste wife are similar to those found in Hindu literature.

However, Nala's trust in Damayanti's fidelity is challenged by the announcement of the second *svayamvara*. In Somaprabhasuri, Nala, upon hearing of the second wedding thinks: "Damayanti is the most chaste woman; she would never desire another man. And even if she did, what man could have her while I am still alive?"

(Granoff 1998:214). Rsivardhan gives us a more cynical Nala: "Then the wise Nala thought this in his mind: 'Even if the sun should rise in the west, nevertheless the daughter of King Bhima, who is the last word among virtuous women, would not even look at any man other [than me]. If Davadanti should make a choice at her second *svayamvara*, what woman, then, in this great *sansåra* will act as is fit! But the mind of a woman, capricious like lightning, changes in a moment. With me alive, however, what man will wed that jewel of women, Davadanti?'" (Bender 1952:329). However much Nala may doubt Damayanti to be as constant as he would like, the readers know that she is. This episode really represents Nala's lack of trust in Damayanti (as compared to her utter trust of him) and highlights the errors in his understanding while at the same time voicing the generalized misogyny of Jain monastic writings. Later tellings which focus more clearly on Damayanti's virtue have Nala more confident in her virtue: "How can it be that Damayanti, that dutiful young woman would be having a second *svayamvara*? I must return to see what is going on. Damayanti is the ideal woman dedicated to her husband. No one can ever fill her footsteps." (Dhami 1998:65). Damayanti's status as a *satī* is thus confirmed by both her virtue and the fact that all recognize it.

Like other *satīs*, Damayanti's chastity itself is a source of power and the Jain versions include a few episodes in which Damayanti's chastity is channeled towards achieving some miraculous goal. Her chastity protects her from many dangers in the jungle: a lion, a herd of angry elephants, poisonous snakes, demons and their ilk, and even forest fires cannot touch her (Granoff 1998:194). In Hemacandra's version, Damayanti uses her chastity as a kind of collateral to achieve her goal. After Damayanti chooses to marry Nala in the *svayamvara*, Krishna threatens to abduct her and Nala raises his sword to protect her. Damayanti, fearing that she might have to marry Krishna rather than Nala, and abhorring violence, stops the fight. According to Hemacandra, Damayanti makes a pledge that if she is worthy, then the guardian goddess would ensure that no harm would arise from Damayanti's acts and that the armies of Nala and Krishna will be at peace. She then sprays water on

them from a pitcher, and Krishna is humbled and asks Nala to forgive him (Johnson 1962:102). In some other versions of this episode, Damayanti says a Navkār Mantra to empower the water to cool the argument. In another episode, Damayanti sees a thief, and out of compassion releases him when he pleads with her. "With these words, Bhima's daughter made a declaration of virtue. 'If I am a virtuous woman, let his bonds fall completely apart.' After she made such a declaration of virtue, she splashed the thief three times with water from a pitcher and his bonds fell apart quickly" (Johnson 1962:130). Later, when a group of ascetics who have been listening to Damayanti's expositions on Jainism are endangered by torrential rains, Damayanti protects them: "She dug a trench all around them and then made this truth-oath that was a proclamation of her chaste conduct, 'If my chastity has never been sullied, then let the clouds rain down outside this trench.' As soon as she said this, water stopped falling inside the area of the trench, as if the area were protected by a roof" (Granoff 1998:197). In another commonly included episode, Damayanti uses the power of her chastity to make water appear when she is thirsty. "Then from the power of her own chastity when she stamped her foot on the earth water flowed, and it was sweet drinking water" (Dhami 1998:59). Throughout, Damayanti is able to use her chastity to control water, linking the cooling effects of chastity to those of water. Thus Damayanti's chastity is invoked in ways not unlike those in all *satī* literature and indicates her position within that category.

While Damayanti is wandering the jungle alone, she is assured that she will meet Nala again in twelve years. Damayanti then demonstrates her virtue as a dedicated wife by taking vows, as expected of worthy wives, to protect her virtue and her husband's health and honor: "After she knew her husband's banishment would last twelve years, she made various vows, shoots of the tree of virtuous wifehood" (Johnson 1962:118). The particular vow she took was a temporary vow of celibacy: "Mahāsatī Damayanti immediately [upon hearing that she would meet with Nala after twelve years] took a vow that until she met with her lord again, she abandoned betel, colored clothes, flowers, ornaments, and the signs of auspicious

wifehood" (Dhami 1998:56). She then retires to a cave to worship the Jina Santinath and perform fasts. Damayanti's vow specifically proscribes the benefits and pleasures of wifehood, in part mimicking the ordination vows and in part accepting a kind of temporary widowhood—a severe austerity for an auspicious woman. These austerities are intended to help protect her chastity and to give her strength in her solitude. Jain karma cannot be transferred to another and thus her vow taking cannot help Nala; it can only protect his honor by protecting his wife. By renouncing all of her enjoyment and beauty, Damayanti preserves her virtue and increases her power through austerity.

Renunciation versus Romantic Attachment

Where the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*'s Damayanti wishes to die when she is left alone in the jungle (van Buitenen 1975:340), the Jain Damayanti wishes to become a nun. After Nala abandons her, Damayanti asks to be given ordination as a Jain nun (Johnson 1962:124). Somaprabhasuri writes: "Damayamti also asked Jasabhadda [Yasobhadra], 'Please ordain me, too.' Jasabhadda replied, 'Lady! You still have pleasures to enjoy with Nala. You should not renounce the world yet'" (Granoff 1998:200). Damayanti then defers her renunciation until after she and Nala are reunited and have ruled for some time. Near the end of the story, Nala and Damayanti are convinced—often by the story of their past lives—to renounce worldly life. The different versions do not agree on which mendicant gave them their ordination and variously mention Jinabhadda (Granoff 1998:219; Tawney 1895:231), Jinasena (Johnson 1962:147) and Srutasagar (Dhami 1998:60). In most texts, the monk goes unnamed. In all the versions (except for those in the Jain folktale collections) Nala and Damayanti ultimately take ordination as a Jain monk and nun and this, it would seem, should end their love story but it does not.

In most Jain tellings, Nala ultimately fails as a monk because of his passionate attachment to Damayanti, a passion which is not cooled by his renunciation: "One day Nala directed his mind toward

Davadanti for the sake of pleasure... As he was unable to keep the vow [of *brahmacarya*], Nala commenced a fast unto death; and Davadanti did so, also, from affection for Nala" (Johnson 1962:148). Nala chooses to fast to death to avoid the further karma that might arise from his continuing to break his celibacy vow. Nala's death is a valid response to being unable to uphold the monastic vows. Damayanti then takes the vow to fast to death so as to follow Nala into death. This is the perfect act for a devoted wife but inappropriate for a Jain nun, who is supposed to have renounced her attachments, especially to such worldly passions. Damayanti's fasting to death is problematic insofar as she is doing so to follow her husband (whom she has theoretically renounced), but at least in fasting to death she maintains her *satī* status without resorting to death on the funeral pyre. Because these deaths are accompanied by passion (the attachment to each other), neither achieves spiritual liberation until several lifetimes later.

Somaprabhasuri tells the narrative in the most human terms: "But because karma works in such strange ways, and because passion is so difficult to overcome, the monk Nala again felt desire in his mind for Damayamti... Unable to keep his vows, Nala renounced all food and undertook a fast to death. Damayamti, ever devoted to Nala, died along with him. Nala was reborn as the god Kubera and Damayamti was reborn as his wife. Because they did not strictly keep their monastic vows they were reborn as only minor gods. Both of them will eventually fall from that godly realm; they will destroy their karma and obtain Final Liberation" (Granoff 1998:222–23). Somaprabhasuri alone states that Damayanti was unable to maintain her vow as a nun. This challenges her status as a virtuous nun, as Damayanti is fasting to death because she cannot uphold her vows as a nun. But it circumvents the problem of using the Jain vow of fasting to death in order to die along with one's husband.

Of all the Jain versions, Rsivardhan's shows Nala in the best light. He writes: "One day the great ṛṣī Nala became attached in his mind to the pleasures of the objects of the senses. Then, with discrimination, in order to obstruct further karma, that prince of *muṇis* undertook [death by] starvation... And Davadanti, being

without transgressions and maintaining the burden of restraint with all her nature, became the *devī* of Dhanada and was filled with great bliss" (Bender 1951:340). Nala's failure as a monk (which this represents despite the claims to his being a prince of *muṇis*) is redeemed through his starvation but here Damayanti is explicitly cleared of any possible accusations of a like failure and also of any of the theological complications. Damayanti is a good nun until she dies (presumably naturally) and is reborn as a goddess.

Most contemporary versions often gloss the end of the story with a happily ever after obscuring the inherent conflict which may be one cause for the diminished interest in retelling the story of Nala and Damayanti. However, the version in *Soḷ Mahāsatiyo* includes Nala's failure as a monk, stating clearly that it is his love of Damayanti which causes him to break his vows, but also upholds Damayanti's sinless renunciation: "However, the monk Nala time and again maintained his devotion to Damayanti. In the end, the monk Nala by the means of the vow of fasting was then reborn in the heavens as Kubera. Damayanti having completed her renunciation was then born as Kubera's wife and from there was born as Vasudeva's wife Kanakavati and achieved liberation. Nala then came down from heaven and was born as a human man, and in proper order attained liberation" (Dhami 1998:70). Nala's weakness and Damayanti's chastity become the hinges for Jain versions which turn on the virtue of steadfastness and fortitude.

Why tell the Nala and Damayanti story?

Jains make a variety of claims as to the benefits of hearing the Nala and Damayanti story. The uses divide into three basic groups: 1) to illustrate the weakness of humanity and the consequences of being weak; 2) to illustrate the virtue of women's fidelity and fortitude in adversity; and 3) to show the benefits of Jain worship. Sometimes two or more ends are claimed in a single text. In the first group, the weakness is always attributed Nala. In both Hemacandra and Somaprabhasuri's tellings, the story is, like in the *Mahābhārata*, a cautionary tale against gambling. Somaprabhasuri writes: "The Jain

monk Hemacandra explained to King Kumarapala: 'A person addicted to gambling loses everything he has just like Nala, who lost his entire kingdom.' The king asked, 'Who was that Nala?' The monk replied, 'Listen.'" and tells the story of Nala and Damayanti (Granoff 1998:177). With the exception of the contemporary tellings, which do not include any details after the ordination of Nala and Damayanti as Jain mendicants, Nala's failure as a Jain monk (due to love) and his redemption through fasting-unto-death rather than breaking the vow also teaches the importance of constancy to vows.

The second group focuses on Damayanti as a Jain *satī*. Her inclusion in the *satī* lists and collections indicate her place as a worthy role model for Jain women. In Jain *satī* narratives, the *satī* can be considered a worthy role model only if her own exertion combined with religious practices marks her life and leads to her success. At the close of the Damayanti narrative in a *satī* collection, Dhami sums up why Damayanti is a Jain *mahāsatī*: "Mahāsatī Damayanti would not have left her husband even in misfortune unto death. Her own life was protected by being bound in the chains of her fortitude. And because of this [fortitude] and from her religious practices, her soul's brilliance and self-discipline increased so that through her own exertion she led an ideal life. Mahāsatī Damayanti as a woman of only good conduct is worthy of imitation" (Dhami 1998:70). Each Jain *satī* should be both virtuous and religious which can lead to internal conflict where there are two paths: devoted wife and renouncing nun (Kelting 2003:233). In the end, each author must answer the challenge of this conflict and most try to uphold Damayanti's status both as a dedicated wife and as a nun. What is not in conflict is Damayanti's exemplary fidelity, piety, and steadfastness. Even when Nala doubts Damayanti's fidelity at the time of the second *svayamvara*, the reader never doubts Damayanti's virtue.

Finally, the Nala and Damayanti narrative is used to demonstrate the power and benefits of performing Jina worship. Throughout Jain tellings, Damayanti's faithful worship of the Jina Santinath, her performance of Jain mendicant veneration, her fasting and food restrictions, and her recitation of the Navkār Mantra are credited with her protection and ultimate felicity. In *Upadeśaprasād*

Mahāgranth, Nala and Damayanti are represented as good renouncers who in the fullness of time achieve heaven (Sri Virat 1992–1993:7). There is no hint of Nala's failed renunciation. I suspect this is partly because the story is told as one about the benefits of Jina worship rather than a reflection of human frailty. The *Upadeśaprasād Mahāgranth* introduces the Nala and Damayanti narrative (named here, "Damayanti *Kathā*") with a statement on the power of Jina worship: "Those beings destined for liberation who desire to fulfill the duty of Jina worship and the tradition of well-being [the lay path] will achieve the happiness of Damayanti." (Sri Virat 1992–1993:1). Thus the narrative becomes an example for other Jains who strive for virtue and happiness. The texts themselves make explicit statements about the narrative's efficacy. Rsivardhansuri writes: "Having done reverence to the lord Santi, who produces contentment and peace (*santi*) for all the Congregation, I shall proclaim the mighty power of merit coming from alms-giving, moral conduct, religious austerity, and meditation. When one hears good stories about noble people his merit and purity increase. [So] listen to this delightful tale of King Nala and Davadanti... As one hears [this story] to the end, of him increases the discrimination of dharma" (Bender 1951:330). Sharpening of discrimination (right understanding) leads directly, of course, to right conduct. At the close of his version, Rsivardhan tells us: "He who recites or causes to be recited this tale, to him come success, prosperity, happiness, and joy" (Bender 1951:341). Here, too, is shown the Jain belief that out of right conduct come not only ultimate liberation but also worldly felicity.

Sri Virat's Damayanti narrative concludes with a statement of the narrative's efficacy: "Thus is the story of Damayanti told and those householders who listen perform continual and correct worship of the glorious body of the Jinas are made firm [in their virtue]. From the power of worship Damayanti went from sorrow to happiness. The power of Jina worship is inconceivable. From Jina worship, one's inner emotions become fixed on one's duty" (Sri Virat 1992–1993:7). Here the worship of the Jinas can overcome the natural inconstancy and weakness of humanity by giving one

inner strength and firmness. Herein lies the key to the story's efficacy. By juxtaposing the woes of Nala who is weak against the ultimate virtue and happiness of Damayanti, the Jain tellings of the Nala and Damayanti story are able to glorify the Jain religion while simultaneously (but not unproblematically) participating in the tradition of the great love story of Nala and Damayanti.

Love stories are compelling. So how can good Jains be good Jains in a world where passion is so powerful? Perhaps this conflict is the one which underlies the struggle for Jain authors to tell the Nala and Damayanti story. A virtuous wife must be steadfast in her devotion to both religion and her husband; Jain *satī* narratives never fully resolve this when they tell the stories of virtuous wives like Damayanti. For virtuous men, renunciation is the only path. Nala's love for Damayanti becomes his weakness, which ultimately prevents his liberation. Nala himself explains the predicament: "Confused by excessive affection because she [Damayanti] was my wife in a former birth, I am here [reborn], for affection lasts for hundreds of births" (Johnson 1962:148). The problem for Jain authors of the Nala and Damayanti story is thus clearly stated: how do you reconcile the affection of many lifetimes with the call for renunciation and equanimity? Jain authors have told the story of Nala and Damayanti over and over again seemingly seeking the right balance, while Nala and Damayanti live out their love story in telling after telling, life after life, until they finally resolve their love and achieve liberation.

Appendix
Brief history of Jain versions of the Nala and Damayanti story

Śvetāmbar Jain monks have told the story of Nala and Damayanti in Sanskrit, Prakrit, Gujarati and Hindi as well as Marwari and Rajasthani.[6] Most of the tellings are in Sanskrit, reflecting their place in larger puranic collections. Within the context of Jain tellings of the *Mahābhārata* story, the Nala and Damayanti story appears both as an independent text and as a part of *satī* or sermon collections. The narrative has been told also in a variety of genres, most

commonly in Jain puranic literature and medieval *rāso* literature, but also in didactic narratives, sermons, poetry, and, in one case, devotional verse. The *rāso* style and its romantic implications provide a popular genre for this romantic story and the medieval *rāsos* dominate the independent versions of this narrative. *Satī* narrative collections are the location of most contemporary accounts of Nala and Damayanti. There are a smattering of tellings in collected sermons and the story is occasionally told in contemporary sermons (Fohr 2001:137).[7] The variety of genres suggests the story's popularity and adaptability. Contemporarily, the Damayanti narrative is found in many Jain *satī* collections but it does not have much of a life on its own except in the medieval period. For example, while many of the Jain *satīs* have separate narratives told in individual "edifying" novels, in fasting narratives, in the genre of devotional poetry called *sajjhāy* or study, and in hymns, Nala and Damayanti have only one *sajjhāy* dedicated to them but no hymns, fasting narratives, or novels. It is only in the *rāso* literature that this story regularly seems to stand alone.

Perhaps the earliest telling is in Dharmadas's ninth century *Vāsudevahindi* followed by Trivikrama's *Nalacampu* in 915 CE, which is also the earliest example of a new medieval genre, the *campu* (Caudhari 1973:538). The next earliest telling is the *Kathākos* of Prabhacandra in the tenth century. Two centuries later we find the *Davayanticarit* of Somaprabhasuri and Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭi-śalākapuruṣa-caritram* (The Lives of the Sixty-Three Illustrious Men, Tapā Gacch) in the twelfth century. Two centuries later we find Subhasilaganivir's *Śrī Bhārateśvara Bahubali Vṛttiḥ* (The Auspicious Commentary of Lord Bharat and Bahubali), which is dated to 1453 CE. Prabhacandra's, Hemacandra's (the longest and most detailed telling of the story), and Subhasilaganivir's tellings seem to be key sources for contemporary tellings.

There are many versions of the Nala and Damayanti story in Sanskrit and Prakrit including Dharmadasganivir's *Nalacarit* (in *Vāsudevahindi*), Hemacandracaya's *Nalacarit* (in *Triṣaṣṭi-śalākapuruṣa-caritram*), Somaprabhacarya's *Davayanticarit* (in *Kumarpal Pratibodha*, 1184 CE), Rāmacandrasūri's *Nalavilās Nāṭak*

(between 1166–1230), Devaprabhasuri's *Nalacarit* (in *Pāṇḍavacarit*, early thirteenth century), Somatilakasuri's *Davayantikathā* (in *Śīlopadeśamālā*, fourteenth century Tapā Gacch), Trivikrama Bhatta's *Damayanti Kathā Campu* (before 1407–1408), Manikyasuri's *Nalāyaṇa* (1428–1429), Subhasilaganivi's *Davayantikathā* (in *Bhārateśvara Bahubali Vṛttiḥ*, 1453), Devavijay's *Nalacarit* (in *Pāṇḍavacarit*), Gunavijayganivir's *Nalacarit* (in *Neminathacarit*, perhaps the seventeenth century Tapā Gacch monk), and Jinasagarasuri's *Davayantikathā* (in *Karpurprakaratika*). Throughout the medieval period we also find versions of the Nala and Damayanti story in Old Gujarati (or mixed language texts) including Jayasekharasuri's *Nala Damayanticampu* (1447–1448), Rsivardhanasuri's *Naladavadanti Rāsa* (1455–1456, Ancal Gacch, Gujarati with some Apabhramsa), Nayasundara's *Nalāyaṇa Uddhara Rāsa* (1600, Gujarati), and Samayasundara's *Naladavadanti Copāi* (1616–1617, Gujarati).[8] That so many learned monks retold the story indicates that its presence in contemporary Jain tellings is clearly not a new absorption of a Hindu narrative but a longstanding acceptance of this story as a vehicle for Jain instruction.

In contemporary settings, the narrative is included in collections of Jain *satī* narratives, like *Soḷ Mahāsatiyo* and *Jina Śāsananam Śrāmanīratno*, in collections of Jain folktales, like *Jain Kahānīyā* and *Jain Kathāmālā*, and occasionally told as part of sermons, like those in the modern collection *Upadeśaprasād Mahāgranth*. In the *satī* narrative collections, Damayanti is included alongside other *satīs*. For example, in *Soḷ Mahāsatiyo*, her narrative is included as she is one of the sixteen *satīs* whose stories are told in the book. Likewise, *Jina Śāsananam Śrāmanīratno* includes the narratives of all of the *satīs* included in the much older *Śrī Bhārateśvara Bahubali Vṛttiḥ* alongside other great women of Jainism. The collections of Jain folktales are multi-volume collections in which the Jain stories are told as discrete narratives rather than in a connected meta-narrative like the *purāṇas*. The versions in both of these folktale collections end with Nala and Damayanti's mutual recognition, suggesting that they are being told primarily as love stories here, differing from all the other tellings of the narrative which present the story as a tale of

karma, renunciation, and/or the virtues of *satīs*. The sermon version of the story is the most didactic of the modern versions; the narrative is shortened to include only those episodes which exemplify the intended lesson about the power of Jain worship.

The Nala and Damayanti story does not seem to have maintained its popularity. There are few modern and contemporary tellings and I have found none outside of collections. Many of the *satīs* and great men have independent versions—their narratives are a popular source for Jain novels and comic books—but Nala and Damayanti do not appear in any I have surveyed. Their story does appear in several collections but always alongside the many other virtuous Jains worthy of discussion. Within the hymn literature, I found one *sajjhāy* dedicated to Nala and Damayanti which probably dates from an earlier period but which is included in a contemporary hymn collection, *Śrī Jain Sajjhāy Mālā*, but this too was only included in one collection. The absence of the story from Jain hymns suggests that the focus on love (and a passionate love that is not effectively cooled even at renunciation) is not appropriate for a genre which is used to praise the Jinas and those who emulate them (Kelting 2001:88). Instead, Nala and Damayanti reside in the genres that include or focus on Jains who struggle to be good Jains.

Notes

1. The Nala and Damayanti story is found in the literatures of other Śvetāmbar groups and also in Digambar literature. I focus here on Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak Jains both because they are the largest community of Jains and because they are the community within which I conduct my field research. My own fieldwork is with lay Jains who identify themselves with the Tapā Gacch mendicant lineage of the Mūrtipūjaks—the largest mendicant lineage—and who live in Maharashtra.
2. The sixty-three illustrious men are composed of the twenty-four Jinas, twelve *cakravartins*, and nine each of *bāladevas*, *vasudevas* and *prativasudevas*. See Cort 1993 for a full treatment of this model.
3. The eleven *kāmadevas* with independent narratives are Bahubali, Vijaycandra, Sricandra, Nala, Hanuman, Baliraja, Vasudeva,

Pradyamna, Nagakumar, Jivandhara, and Jambu. Prajapati, Sribhadra, Darsanbhadra, Prasenacandra, Candravarna, Agnimukha, Vatsaraj, Kanakaprabha, and Meghaprabha do not have any significant narrative literature.

4. Udayratna wrote the *Soḷ Satī no Chānd* between 1692 and 1743. These dates (V.S. 1749–1799) refer to a Jain monk Udayratna who wrote several similar genre devotional pieces including *chānds* (Kelting 2006:186–87).
5. Somaprabhasuri's text is virtually the same as Hemacandra's. Hemacandra writes: "A *tilaka* on her forehead, a rival of the Sun, was present at birth, like the *śrīvatsa* on the breast of a great man" (Johnson 1962:98).
6. The multitudes of texts in the Jain narrative literature corpus make tracing any single story particularly challenging. I include here a survey of Nala and Damayanti versions collected by various scholars of Jainism. This is necessarily incomplete but represents the scope of the narrative's presence within the Śvetāmbar community.
7. Fohr heard two abbreviated versions and one extended version told by Sthānakvāsī Jain nuns (personal correspondence, July 15, 2004). I have twice heard very abbreviated versions told in sermons in Maharashtra.
8. These lists and dates are assembled from Caudhari 1973, 138–39; Cort 2001; Dave 1993 and 1998; Dundas 2002; and the Patan Bhandar catalogue. Thanks to John Cort for supplying this information from Patan Bhandar catalogue.

Leaving Damayanti Again (and Again): Jain Retellings of the Nala Story

Phyllis Granoff

In this paper I explore the theme of loss and recovery in the story of Nala and Damayanti. My focus is a medieval Jain retelling of the Nala story. I propose that in stark contrast to the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, in which it is the reunion of Nala and Damayanti that is celebrated, for the Jain story Nala and Damayanti's greatest achievement is in separating from each other, something that they only succeed in doing over the course of many lifetimes. The contrast between these two versions of the story shows clearly how a story could be retold to convey strikingly different religious messages. In a concluding section of the paper I suggest that it was not just in such explicit retellings that the story of Nala and Damayanti could be used to meditate on the theme of loss and recovery. Even allusions to the story of Nala and Damayanti could shape other stories, and in a way that makes the meaning of the Nala story much more nuanced. My contention will be that as the story of Nala and Damayanti cast its shadow over other epic tales, it could do so in such a way that room was ultimately found for the messages of both the *Mahābhārata* and the Jain versions of Nala and Damayanti's ordeal. I begin from a consideration of the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*, followed by a discussion of the Jain story, and conclude with some comments on the theme of loss and reunion in an Assamese Vaishnava drama on the marriage of Krishna and Rukminī.

The Sanskrit *Mahābhārata*: Bṛhadaśva's Lessons and the Strength of Human Bonds

As we seek to understand the story of Nala and Damayanti and its many transformations, we might well begin with the earliest gloss on the story. This is the one provided by the *Mahābhārata* itself, which allows the sage Bṛhadaśva to conclude his recitation of the story with a pointed commentary on the message that he wants his audience, Yudhiṣṭhira and three of his brothers, and all of us listeners, to take away from the telling. For Bṛhadaśva the story of Nala and Damayanti is very clearly a story of searing loss and joyous recovery. In 3.78.1, Bṛhadaśva tells Yudhiṣṭhira how the entire city of Kundina celebrated the reunion of Nala and Damayanti.[1] As the story ends, we may recall, Nala, who had been temporarily transformed into an ugly hunchback, has regained his original handsome appearance; he has found his wife and children and has reclaimed his kingdom. This is a story with an unquestioned happy ending, and the audience surely was encouraged to share in the joy of the citizens of Kundina at Nala's good fortune. The story was also meant to give courage to the exiled Yudhiṣṭhira in his recurring moments of abject self-pity. Bṛhadaśva explicitly consoles Yudhiṣṭhira with this assurance: Just as Nala, having been brought to grief through the play of dice, eventually came to prosper, so will Yudhiṣṭhira ultimately triumph; restored to his throne, like Nala he will go on to sacrifice with many sacrifices, in which there will be ample opportunity to give generously to the Brahmins (3.78.5).

Bṛhadaśva also pauses to answer directly a question that Yudhiṣṭhira had earlier asked him and that had in fact motivated him to tell the story of Nala and Damayanti in the first place. Bṛhadaśva had come upon four of the five Pandavas, despondent in the forest. Their despondency is, of course, a response to their exile, but their suffering has been increased even further by the absence of one of the brothers. The beloved Arjuna has left his four brothers behind and proceeded on a perilous journey to seek divine weapons. This new loss has intensified and freshened the grief of the four brothers who stayed behind in the forest. Vaiśampāyana describes for us their mood; they are pained by sorrow, miserable, and can hardly speak through the

sobs that are caught in their throat. In short, they grieve deeply over the absence of their brother Arjuna. In the words of the text,

Duḥkhārtā bhārataśreṣṭhā niṣeduḥ saha kṛṣṇayā/
Dhanañjayaṃ śocamānāḥ śāśrukaṇṭhāḥ suduḥkhitāḥ//
Tadviyogāddhi tān sarvāñ śokaḥ samabhiplupluve (3.49.3–4).

"Pained by suffering, the best of the Bharatas sat there with Krishna, grieving over the absence of Dhanajaya, sobs caught in their throats, utterly wretched. Indeed sorrow had flooded over them at Arjuna's departure." Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bṛhadaśva if there ever was any king so wretched as he now is. The story of Nala and Damayanti is the answer to this question, and as Bṛhadaśva concludes his story he makes explicit what that answer is. Bṛhadaśva tells Yudhiṣṭhira that Nala was far worse off in his exile than Yudhiṣṭhira is in his. The reason he gives is simple. Nala was totally alone, while Yudhiṣṭhira has the company of his brothers and his wife. He is also served by learned Brahmins. Indeed, Bṛhadaśva seems to lose patience with the whining Yudhiṣṭhira as he plainly asks him, *tatra kā paridevanā*, "What do you have to complain about?" (3.78.9).

The *Mahābhārata* thus depicts the story of Nala and Damayanti as an answer to Yudhiṣṭhira's question, a question that was provoked by the four Pandavas almost disproportionate grief at the absence of just one of their brothers. We must look carefully at the answer to that question, which asserts unambiguously that the worst fate that can befall a man is to be totally alone. I would argue that the *Mahābhārata* in setting the story of Nala and Damayanti in this particular context asks us to read it at least in part as a glorification of the bonds that constitute human social life, without which Nala was indeed the most miserable of men. Yudhiṣṭhira, it tells us, despite the loss of his kingdom and the public humiliation of his wife, is still far better off than Nala was because he was able to maintain and further the bonds that for Nala were severed in exile. Yudhiṣṭhira has not lost his fraternal ties or his matrimonial ties. It is Nala and not Yudhiṣṭhira whom we are to pity. Nala's plight was as miserable a plight as any that can befall a man: to be without wife, without children, without brothers, without counselors; that is, to be divorced

from all human connectedness. In this reading the story of Nala and Damayanti is a story about the need to sustain social relations in their many forms. That need is taught by illustrating in graphic terms the pain that accompanies the sundering of social bonds and the joy that marks their restoration. That this is the message we are to take from the story is clear from its context as well as from Bṛhadaśva's explicit statements.

Further, Bṛhadaśva tells his audience that the story of Nala should serve as a cautionary tale, reminding us all of the impermanence of the objects of human desire; we are separated from our loved ones and reunited with them in a cycle over which we have no control. Knowing that good fortune comes and goes, Bṛhadaśva instructs Yudhiṣṭhira that a person should take heart and not grieve when things do not go well (3.78.11). This is a message that is told many times in the *Mahābhārata*; fortune is a wheel that raises us and plunges us down into the depths of misery in unending cycles. The story of Nala and Damayanti, then, tells us that the greatest good is participation in human society and that all we need to do to share in it is to be patient; we must be prepared to wait out the down-cycles of our lives, during which we may be wrested from our loved ones, for ultimately we will be restored to those whom we most need.

It should come as no surprise that a renunciatory tradition like the Jain tradition, founded on the premise that human social relations are the ultimate impediment to achieving liberation, would find the story of Nala and Damayanti in its interpretation by Bṛhadaśva a story that they did not particularly want to tell. In fact, despite the Jain love for all kinds of stories from all kinds of sources, they do not seem to have been particularly eager to recount the story of Nala and Damayanti. And when they did, they made some crucial and startling changes. The story of Nala and Damayanti for the Jains is not a cautionary tale about the need for human relationships and the need to persevere in their pursuit. To the contrary, it is told as a dire warning of the tenacity of love and longing that keeps us from achieving the true goal: liberation from all of the bonds of human society so that we may pursue the path to liberation. Nala and Damayanti's reunion in the Jain story is not at all the "happy

end" to a tragic series of events: rather, it is only the beginning of more troubles for each of them. Although both renounce the world, so great is Nala's love for Damayanti that he is doomed to fail as a monk. Together Nala and Damayanti must roam from birth to birth, united by their love that prevents them from realizing the true goal of human striving. Their story only concludes when they have finally succeeded in sundering their ties and in their isolation achieve salvation. What for Bṛhadaśva was Nala's nadir becomes for the Jain storyteller Nala's ultimate aspiration. I turn now to examine the Jain story of Nala and Damayanti from a twelfth century Jain Prakrit retelling from Somaprabhasūri's *Kumārapālapratibodha* of 1195 CE.[2]

Jain Retellings of the Story of Nala and Damayanti: One Reunion too Many

The Jains retold stories from both the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata* in different ways and for different reasons.[3] Sometimes they recited a story from the epics or *purāṇas* with the sole purpose of holding it up to ridicule. The most egregious example of this is Haribhadra's Prakrit text, the *Dhūrtākhyāna*, in which a group of rogues vie with each other to see who can tell the most absurd tale. In this riotous contest, the winner is not the person who can prove the teller wrong, but the one who can prove the patently fantastic story to be true by using illustrations of even more fanatastically absurd stories from the Hindu *purāṇas* and epics![4] While Haribhadra's text experienced some popularity, as is attested by the existence of later Sanskrit and old Gujarati versions, by and large it was an exceptional strategy even for the Jains in dealing with non-Jain story material. For the most part Jains retold epic stories, some of which may have even been common property of all the religious traditions in their earliest tellings, in the mold of Jain didactic stories, which had developed their own distinctive narrative devices and themes. The changes they made to Hindu stories often followed simple guidelines: Jains toned down the violence of the original stories; they tended to reject certain aspects of the miraculous, for example, they rejected the notion

that offspring could be born from the union of humans and gods, as the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* are said to have been; they also made the stories they told conform to a strict code of morality, erasing much of the moral ambiguity of the original versions.[5] In addition, they frequently inserted sub-stories into the frame of the larger tale. Many of these sub-stories tell of the past births of characters in the story; they all teach some important aspect of Jain belief or practice.

Many of the differences between the Jain version of the story of Nala and Damayanti and that told in the Sanskrit epic can be understood in terms of these kinds of changes that Jains often made to the stories they adapted. Thus, the caravan that Damayanti joins is not destroyed in the Jain version; she saves them by the power of her chastity. Indeed throughout the Jain story Damayanti is portrayed more as a heroine than as a victim. Through her steadfast devotion and her fidelity to her husband she rescues her fellow travelers from danger and keeps some ascetics from drowning in a heavy rain. She prays fervently to the Jina Śāntinātha, who is the object of her personal devotion, her *iṣṭadevatā*, and she carries with her a special miraculous image of Śānti made of gold that the "Goddess of Liberation" had given her when she was just a child. Damayanti also spreads the Jain teaching to others, a service to humanity that is singled out for praise in medieval Jain literature, particularly medieval biographies of monks. Damayanti teaches the caravan leader and a group of Hindu ascetics about Jainism and converts them to the true faith. The caravan leader uses his wealth to build a new city in which he erects a temple to Śāntinātha. With her newly converted friends Damayanti attends the celebration that the gods make for a Jain monk who has obtained Omniscience. On this occasion a god joins them and explains his own past birth and how he became a god. During the course of his account of himself, he teaches his audience about the importance of the cardinal Jain virtue, non-violence. At several points in the story Damayanti wishes to renounce the world and become a nun; she is told that she still has some karma which can only come to fruition through her remaining a lay woman and being reunited with Nala. Damayanti is also told

that she will be reunited with her husband and when that reunion will occur. Her energy is spent not in searching for him and mourning his absence, but in doing pious work. For seven years she meditates in a mountain cave. Even when she resumes her wandering, there is always the comfort of finding a fellow Jain. Damayanti eventually makes her way to the city of king Riupaṇṇa, Ṛtuparṇa, where she serves in his almshouse, distributing food to the poor. It is there that she is eventually discovered by a messenger whom her father has sent in search of her.

Nala's sojourn in the forest, although less altered perhaps from the *Mahābhārata* version than was Damayanti's journey, has still undergone telling changes. In the forest Nala does not meet the snake-king Karkotaka, as in the *Mahābhārata* version, but in a uniquely Jain mode he encounters a god who was his father, now deceased. Family members, reborn as gods and other beings, are constantly cropping up in Jain stories, often in unusual ways.[6] Nisaha, Nala's father, explains to Nala that he had given up his throne and become a monk. Upon his death he had become a god; using his supernatural knowledge he had come to see that his son was in trouble. He tells Nala that he transformed himself into a snake and bit Nala so that Nala would become disfigured; this disfigurement would serve as his disguise, keeping his identity concealed from those who might wish to do him harm. He promises Nala that when it comes time for Nala to renounce the world he will come and remind him. He gives him a magic fruit and jewel box that will restore him to his former self. Nala also asks his father what has become of Damayanti and learns of some of her courageous acts.

There is no question in this story about what is at least the immediate cause of Nala's ruin; the story is told as an example of vice, the vice of gambling. Nala is not a passive victim of the machinations of some supernatural agent, the Kali of the *Mahābhārata* version. He has also not thwarted the gods in their ambition to marry Damayanti. Her other suitors were all mortals, rival kings who assembled for her *svayamvara* or self-choice. And in keeping with the very strict Jain interpretations of karma, good and bad fortune are neither arbitrary nor caused by some divine intervention; they

are clear results of human behavior. Indeed, as we shall see, as the story of Nala and Damayanti progresses, it reaches its climax in an explanation of the workings of karma through an elaborate account of the previous births of both Nala and Damayanti.

Eventually, Nala and Damayanti are reunited and Nala regains his kingdom from his wicked brother. Here the story in the *Mahābhārata* had ended; here the Jain story really begins, with a visit from Nala's father Nisaha, still a radiant god. Nisaha upbraids Nala for his complacent life of pleasure with Damayanti. He reminds him of his promise to urge Nala to renounce the world when the time had come. And so it has, he tells him, and then vanishes. This is the cue for the Jain monk Jinabhadda to appear on the stage. Nala and Damayanti go to Jinabhadda and ask what so many characters ask in these stories. They ask for an explanation of what led to the pains and joys that they have experienced. The Jain monk, who knows the past and future and the births and rebirths of all beings, always responds with a detailed account of their past births. Jinabhadda here tells Nala and Damayanti how once they had harassed a Jain monk for twelve hours; this had been the cause of their having to endure twelve years of pain, separated from each other. They had repented of their cruelty to the monk and become pious Jains. Damayanti in particular had worshipped images of the Jina, painting beauty spots or *tilakas* on their foreheads. This was the source of the magic light-radiating spot with which she was born. Nala and Damayanti were next reborn as a cowherd couple. They continued to have faith in the Jain teachings and treated Jain ascetics with care and respect. In that birth Nala had even become a Jain monk. The pair still retained an intense love for each other and was reborn together, this time as twins in a distant world system. After another birth as gods, Jinabhadda tells them, they have been born as Nala and Damayanti. The monk further explains to them that their piety and service to the Jain monks have resulted in their being born in a high social status, as a prince and princess, who became a king and queen. Their one act of disrespect to a monk had caused all their misery.

Nala and Damayanti, on hearing the account of their lives, do what other characters do in these stories: they renounce the world. Nala makes an honest effort at being a good monk; he studies the scriptures and practices severe penances. But Nala has a fatal flaw as a monk and that is his love for Damayanti. He begins to think of her again and to feel desire for her. Cast out by his fellow monks, Nala is once more aided by his father, the god. Knowing that he is unable to practice his religious vows, Nala undertakes a fast to death, as is recommended in the Jain tradition as early as texts like the *Ācārāṅga Sutta*, I.7.4, ff. Damayanti, too, dies and they are reborn together again as husband and wife in a godly realm.

Like the *Mahābhārata* version, this Jain account also contains its own gloss, lest we should have any doubt about the lesson we are to take away from this entertaining tale. It concludes with these harsh words, "Because they did not strictly keep their monastic vows, they were reborn as only minor gods. Both of them will eventually fall from that godly realm; they will destroy their karma and obtain Final Liberation."

The union of Nala and Damayanti in this story is thus not the happy ending that it was in the *Mahābhārata*. Here it is a trap that ensnares Nala in transmigratory existence. As Nisaha says to Nala, "Can you call yourself a man, worthy of that designation, when you do not even protect yourself from being robbed of your wisdom by passion and the other vices, that are like so many thieves?... Pick the fruit of the tree of having been born as a human being. Become a monk." The goal of human life is to practice religion and in Jain terms this entails renunciation of the very kind of social entanglements which the *Mahābhārata* story, at least in the gloss of it provided by Bṛhadaśva, celebrates. So great is the power of his bond to Damayanti that Nala fails as a Jain monk. It is only after many rebirths that his story can finally end, in the vague distant future, with the promise of release. The Jain story is a story not of recovery, but of the need for loss. Nala's sojourn in the forest is not merely the negative image of a positive life as king, husband, and father; it is a foretaste of the true sojourn in the forest as a solitary monk.

The *Mahābhārata* and the Jain Nala and Damayanti stories are polar opposites, the one celebrating social bonds and the other excoriating all ties that bind human beings together. But in what follows I would like to suggest that other medieval stories could achieve a compromise between these opposing values and that they did so by subtle allusions to the Nala and Damayanti story, which clearly allowed both readings. I turn briefly now to consider the story of another princess of Vidarbha, the princess Rukminī, and her husband, the god Krishsna. In this Vaishnava devotional tale, union with god, the ultimate religious goal, requires both the intense entanglement of the *Mahābhārata* Nala and Damayanti and the loss of the Jain Nala and Damayanti. I discuss several Sanskrit and one Assamese version of the story of Rukminī and Krishna, in all of which I see allusions to the story of Nala and Damayanti.

The Shadow of Separation: The Story of Rukminī in an Assamese Retelling

Curiously, the Assamese *Mahābhārata*, which was written over a period of several hundred years beginning in the sixteenth century, does not include the story of Nala and Damayanti. Scholars have suggested that the Assamese authors were guided in their selection of what to include and what to omit by one overriding concern: to create a work that was Vaishnava and that taught devotion to Krishna in the mode of the Śaṅkaradeva and his followers.[7] For this reason, it was neither the *Mahābhārata* nor the *Rāmāyaṇa* that most deeply occupied medieval Assamese poets. It was above all the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, a text that Śaṅkaradeva (1449–1568), the founder of Assamese Vaishnavism, translated from Sanskrit into Assamese. One of the episodes in the story of the life of Krishna that Śaṅkaradeva singled out for particular attention was the abduction of Rukminī, which had figured in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the *Harivaṃśa* before it. Śaṅkaradeva in addition to translating the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* also wrote a number of dramas in a combination of Vrajbuli and Sanskrit. One of them, the *Rukminīharaṇa*, is devoted to the story of Krishna

and Rukminī.[8] Like Damayanti, Rukminī is a princess of Vidarbha. Like Damayanti, Rukminī finds obstacles in her marriage to the man she desires. There is also a dishonest dice game by a brother who endeavors to upset the lives of Rukminī and her husband Krishna, once they are married. Rukminī's brother Rukmi challenges Krishna's brother Balarāma to a dishonest game of dice and defeats him by cheating.

The story of Rukminī and Krishna developed from very modest beginnings in the *Harivaṃśa* to become a popular theme in medieval Indian literature. I would like to suggest that as we follow this story from its very brief telling in the *Harivaṃśa* through its more elaborate version in the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and into Śaṅkaradeva's Assamese drama, we can see the story change in a number of significant ways. These changes, moreover, shape the story in a way that brings the accounts of the two Vidarbhan princesses, Damayanti and Rukminī, closer together, for the story of Rukminī changes in ways that remind us of the story of Nala and Damayanti, both in the *Mahābhārata* and in its Jain adaptations. What emerges in the play by Śaṅkaradeva is something of a combination of both the messages we have derived from Nala and Damayanti. In keeping with the overall tone of Vaishnava devotion, the drama of Rukminī and Krishna is a celebration of a union that can only exist in tension with the powerful emotions generated by separation. While it is impossible to prove that Śaṅkaradeva knowingly and consciously shaped his version of Rukminī's abduction under the influence of the Nala story, at the very least I would like to suggest that the power of Nala and Damayanti's story was such that it colored the subsequent experience of epic literature in ways that were often quite subtle.

In the *Harivaṃśa*, the story of Rukminī occupies two chapters of the *Viṣṇuparvan*. In chapter 87 we learn how Jarāsamdha promoted the cause of his ally, the king of Cedi, Śiśupāla, in his suit of Rukminī, daughter of Bhīṣmaka, king of the Vidarbhans. He urged his other allies to support Śiśupāla's efforts to gain the hand of the beautiful princess Rukminī (1–7). There follows a brief account of the genealogy of Rukminī's family, during the course of which we are told that

Rukminī and Krishna had both heard of each other's virtues, though they had never seen each other, and had fallen in love (14–15). This reminds us, of course, of Nala and Damayanti's love for each other, "sight unseen" (III.50.16). We also learn that Rukminī's brother Rukmi has rejected Krishna as a suitable husband for his sister, considering him a mere servant of Kamsa (16). This was, however, merely an excuse; having received the marvelous Brahma weapon from Rāma Jāmadagnya, Rukmi considered Krishna an obstacle to his own rise to supreme power (13). We are also told about the lineage of Śiśupāla, king of the Cedis.

Śiśupāla's rivalry with Krishna is well known in the *Mahābhārata*. In the *Sabhāparvan*, when the question arises as to who should be honored first and foremost at the royal sacrifice performed by Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhisma suggests that Krishna should receive the highest honor and Śiśupāla responds with outrage (II.38). He accuses Krishna of a number of terrible crimes, including killing women and cows, an accusation that Śaṅkaradeva will put in the mouth of Rukmi in his drama on the abduction of Rukminī. In the *Harivaṃśa*, King Bhīṣmaka agrees to give his daughter to Śiśupāla and the kings all assemble to celebrate the wedding. Krishna and Balarāma come as guests. It is the custom for women on the eve of their marriage to go to the temple and worship Indrani. Krishna catches a glimpse of Rukminī, dressed in her wedding finery, as she is going to the temple. He is smitten with desire for her and at once decides with Balarāma and the other Vṛṣṇis that they will abduct her when she leaves the temple (31–40). Krishna snatches Rukminī and puts her onto his chariot; a battle ensues which occupies the rest of the chapter. In the next chapter, Rukmi hears of the abduction of his sister by his detested rival Krishna and promises that he will not reenter his capital city Kundina until he has slain Krishna and retrieved his sister. He is defeated and to keep his vow he builds himself another city named Bhojakata. His father Bhīṣmaka remains to rule in Kundina. Krishna takes Rukminī back to Dvaraka, where he marries her. They have children; Krishna takes other wives, and begets still more children. In the next chapter, Krishna and Rukminī's grandson

Aniruddha seeks the hand of Rukmi's granddaughter. This is the occasion for the vile game of dice, which leads to Rukmi's death.

When we turn to the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, X.52 we see several important changes to the story. Perhaps the most important of these serves to minimize the impetuousness of Krishna's actions and shift the responsibility from Krishna onto Rukminī. Times have changed and it is no longer acceptable for a man simply to abduct a woman who catches his eye. In the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, perhaps already in an echo of the Nala and Damayanti story, there is a go between, who helps arrange the eventual reunion of the two lovers. In Nala and Damayanti it is the geese, the *haṃsas*. In the story of Rukminī it is a Brahmin messenger. In both stories the woman is the bolder and more daring of the two. Once Nala had been approached by the gods and had gone to Damayanti as their advocate, it was Damayanti who had told him what to do. He was to come to her *svayamvara* and she would choose him; the responsibility would be hers (III.59.9–11). In the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* the Brahmin messenger brings this message from Rukminī to Krishna: Rukminī wants only Krishna. She is to be given in marriage to Śiśupāla, but he is utterly loathsome to her. Krishna is to come to her *svayamvara* and he is to take her away. If he should ask (as Nala asked the gods) how he can penetrate the harem with its high walls and heavy guard, Rukminī tells him that she will leave the harem on the day before her wedding to worship at the temple of Śiva and Pārvatī, praying that Krishna should be her husband (39). The goddess, then, must share some of the responsibility for what ensues. In another reminder of the Nala story, Krishna has little time to rescue his intended. The *svayamvara* is to take place the day after the visit from the Brahmin; he must travel at lightning speed in order to be there in time. The rest of the story details the resulting battle and Krishna's victory. The dice game and the death of Rukmi are told much later in chapter 61.

There are other versions in the *purāṇas*.[9] The *Brahmapurāṇa*, chapter 199, contains a brief account of the abduction of Rukminī which is close to that of the *Harivaṃśa*. The same account is found in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* V.26.1–12. The *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*,

Kṛṣṇajanmakhaṇḍa, 105–109, of all the puranic versions I have examined, makes the most changes to the story, although the direction of these changes was already set by the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* with its efforts to minimize the unlawfulness of Krishna's union with Rukminī. In the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, Rukminī's father is depicted as a great devotee of Krishna, eager to give his daughter in marriage to the god until Rukmi intervenes, roundly abusing Krishna as an unsuitable husband for his beloved sister. Balabhadra and Krishna make their way to Kundina after Balabhadra has married Revatī, an episode that is not told in connection with the marriage of Krishna and Rukminī in the other versions discussed here. Balabhadra defeats Rukmi and his faction and Krishna marries the princess Rukminī with her parents' consent and with all the appropriate Vedic rites.

Śaṅkaradeva's changes to the basic story as it was first told in the *Harivaṃśa* are less extensive than those made by the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*.[10] Śaṅkaradeva's account retains all the dramatic potential of the story of the abduction, while making every effort to eliminate from Krishna any taint of impropriety. It also has a distinctly different emphasis; its emotional weight is as much on the fear of loss experienced by the lovers as it is on the joys of their union. Overall, the Assamese drama of Śaṅkaradeva reflects the same kinds of changes from the *Harivaṃśa* that we have highlighted in the discussion of the versions from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*. In Śaṅkaradeva's version, Rukminī and Krishna not only hear about each other from messengers; Rukminī's parents actually decide to give her in marriage to Krishna. This recalls Bhīṣmaka's initial intentions in the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*. This detail insures that neither Krishna not Rukminī can be seen to be acting outside the strict rules of society; their marriage has parental approval. The only problem remains the stubborn and wicked brother, Rukmi. He objects to Krishna here as he did in the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* and for the very reasons that Śiśupāla in the *Mahābhārata* gave to oppose the honoring of Krishna at Yudhiṣṭhira's *rājasūya*.[11] Both the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* and the Assamese drama soften the theme of abduction; neither dispenses with it entirely as

did the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*. The *Bhāgavatapurāṇa* shifted responsibility to Rukminī and to some extent the goddess Pārvatī. In the Assamese text, as we noted, Rukminī's parents initially intend to give her to Krishna. This seemed not to have been sufficient, however. Śaṅkaradeva also shifts the scene of the "abduction." Although Rukminī has told Krishna that he can find her at the temple on the day before her marriage, he actually takes her from her father's court, as she is paraded before the assembled royal suitors; in other words, he takes her at her self-choice, as was perfectly appropriate and sanctioned by Kshatriya society. There is no longer any abduction at all; there is a proper ceremony that is followed, although the rejected suitors respond to their rejection with violence.

This is perhaps another strong reminder of the story of Nala and Damayanti, where Damayanti chooses her husband at her *svayamvara*. Furthermore, I see in what follows another telling allusion to Nala and Damayanti. When Rukminī is brought before the kings they make lewd remarks and obscene gestures at her. Her friends are horrified by their vulgarity and push them aside, even leveling a few well-placed kicks at them. Śaṅkaradeva has the *sūtradhāra*, the authorial voice in the drama, comment on the improper behavior of the rejected suitors and their punishment at the hands of Rukminī's friends: "See, folks, the misery that befalls those who are devoid of faith in Hari and have fallen prey to desire. Knowing this, meditate on the feet of Hari and call out the name, Hari, Hari!" (p.17). Rukminī is here the model devotee. She has rejected the wicked mortals in favor of the god.

The allusion to Nala and Damayanti, if I am not over reading Śaṅkaradeva here, is by contrast. Damayanti rejected the gods and chose a mortal. This was ultimately the cause of her suffering in the *Mahābhārata* story. I return to the *Mahābhārata* for a moment. When the gods are returning from Damayanti's *svayamvara*, they meet Kali and Dvāpara on the road (III.55.1). Indra asks Kali where he is going; Kali replies that he is off to get himself a wife; he is on his way to the *svayamvara* of Damayanti (2–3). Indra laughs and tells him that he is too late; Damayanti has already chosen King Nala. Kali is furious at this news. He says,

"devānāṃ mānuṣaṃ madhye yat sā patim
avindata/nanu tasyā bhaven nyāyaṃ
vipulaṃ daṇḍadhāraṇam//

("Don't you think she deserves a severe punishment, having chosen a man as her husband when she could have chosen one of the gods?"). The gods assure Kali that they approved her choice; they sing the praises of Nala. But Kali is unconvinced. Unable to control his anger, he tells Dvāpara that he will possess Nala. He asks Dvāpara to settle in the dice and help him take revenge on Nala. Thus the stage is set for Nala's trials. The reason for Nala's impending misery is clear. Damayanti has spurned the gods and chosen a man.

Śaṅkaradeva tells us that the pious Rukminī has done the opposite; she has rejected impious mortals and chosen god. Śaṅkaradeva also tells us that those who reject god, impelled by desire, come to great grief, and perhaps here it is only natural that we recall that other Vidarbhan princess, Damayanti, who did just that.

Rukminī, having made the correct choice, is not condemned to suffer the long separation from the object of her love that was the lot of Damayanti. At the same time, her story is not just a story of the union of the princess with her lover, the union of the devotee with god. Separation is a major theme in the play. As Rukminī waits for Krishna to arrive, she suffers the pangs of love in separation and must be consoled by her friends, who fear for her life. When she finally sees him and he attempts to take her from her father's court, she must suffer again the fear of losing him as the outraged kings she has rejected get ready to do battle. Much of the play is taken up with Rukminī's laments. Separation is as real a theme in this story as it was in the story of Nala and Damayanti, consistent with the role of *viraha* bhakti in the Krishna devotion. While Śaṅkaradeva's drama does not make absolute and final separation from the object of love the necessary condition for salvation as had the Jain story, it does suggest that the ultimate union of the devotee with god is an experience enriched by the possibilities of loss. We have seen that the story of Nala and Damayanti, to which I would argue

Śaṅkaradeva alludes, could embrace both separation and union as its ultimate message.

Conclusion

In this essay I have looked at two versions of the story of Nala and Damayanti, the Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* and a Jain Prakrit retelling. I argued that these stories carry distinctly opposing messages. For one, the goal of life is to be sought in the fulfillment of social relationships; for the other; social relationships are the ultimate evil. Human life is meaningful to the extent one can sever all ties and become a renunciate. I then examined a story that I suggest came to be influenced by the poetry and values of the story of Nala and Damayanti. The abduction of Rukminī, I suggest, from its humble beginnings in the *Harivaṃśa*, developed into an elaborate Vaishnava devotional story, in which the separation of the Jain story is fused with the union of the *Mahābhārata* story in a new and compelling religious message. The story of Nala and Damayanti offered religious writers a flexible narrative framework that could directly and indirectly speak to us of both loss and union.

Notes

1. All references are to Vishnu S. Sukthankar et. al. eds., *The Mahābhārata, for the First Time Critically Edited*, 1993.
2. I have translated the story in Granoff 1998:177–224. There is a very similar version that has been translated by Tawney 1895.
3. For a useful introduction to Jain retellings of the major Hindu epics see Jaini 1993.
4. I have translated one of the stories from the Sanskrit rewriting of Samghatilaka done in the fourteenth century. See Granoff 2001.
5. On some of these issues Jains were decidedly ambivalent. See my comments in Granoff 2001.
6. For some examples see Granoff 1994:16–35, and the stories translated in Granoff 1998.
7. See Sarma 1972 for information on the translation of the epics into Assamese. See also Smith 2000 and 1999; and "The Burden of the

Forest: Two Apocryphal Parvans from Vernacular *Mahābhāratas*," unpublished paper. I thank Dr. Smith for copies of these last two.

8. My references are to Śaṅkaradeva 1995:21.
9. A brief discussion of some of the puranic versions can be found in Kubba 1982:58–60.
10. I have intentionally avoided the question of Śaṅkaradeva's sources. It seems to me impossible to know from whom he borrowed or the extent to which his drama is his original creation. I would argue that even if he borrowed some of his "changes" from a text like the *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, the resulting composition is entirely different in tone. The motifs of longing and love in separation are entirely absent from the *Brahmavaivarta*.
11. In fact the transfer of this incident from the *Sabhāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata* to the story of the abduction of Rukminī suggests how easily these texts and stories could and did enrich each other. Indeed much of the *Harivaṃśa* would be retold by adding passages from the *Bhāgavatapurāṇa*, as is clear from even a cursory glance at some of the material the editors of the critical edition relegated to the notes in the passages on Krishna's childhood.

Nala Unhinged: Pukalentippulavar's *Nalavenpa*

David Shulman

Moments Stolen from Sleep

At the moment of deepest sorrow, also of nearly uncontainable tension, in the Tamil poet Pukalentippulavar's lyrical *Nalavenpa* (thirteenth century), we find a triplet of tender verses that encapsulate the relations between these two desperate lovers. They are in the wilderness, a hot and rocky land. They have but one cloth between them to cover their bodies. It is past midnight when they arrive at a ruined *maṇḍapa* where they will try to rest. Damayanti thinks longingly, tearfully, of her well-appointed bedroom in the Nisadha palace; Nala gently holds out his hand to help her lie down on the ground where, he hopes, she will be able to sleep, for

"the terrible wilderness sleeps,
all of space is asleep,
even demons sleep, so
you, too, must take sleep into your eyes
for this long watch." (262)[1]

It is, apparently, a question of actually allowing sleep to enter her through her tearful eyes, as if an outer force were possessing her. She must, he tells her, let this force in; it is her duty (*kaṭaṉ*); even the wild forest demons (*peṛ*), of which he seems to have some knowledge, sometimes sleep. Perhaps the demons are already too close to each of them; Nala has one, the driving, maddening Kali, inside him.

The repetition ("sleeps," *tuyiṉṟu*) lulls Damayanti enough to relax her momentarily; such literal, verbal repetitions are always effective in Pukalenti's *venpa* verses.[2] Now the triplet: first Nala, awake himself, studies his sleeping wife.

"I look at her, asleep in the dust
in this aching hour—and my eye
does not turn to dust, breath
does not leave my body, my heart
fails to explode." (263)

He is horrified at his own ability to contain the sorry spectacle. Life, like breathing, is going on at its own autonomous rhythm. This makes no sense. Apparently, Nala falls asleep in the midst of this painful perception, for in the next verse Damayanti wakes to observe *him*:

"That my lord must sleep on the ground
with no cloth to cover him
is the work of my hand, which entered
his, and of my legs, which followed his."
She wept as tears mixed with kohl
entered her eyes. (264)

As often in this text, the densely compressed syntax of the *venpa* verse is strangely skewed, at first hearing almost unintelligible. Puliyurkkecikan thinks Damayanti is saying that Nala has been reduced to sleeping on the ground with only her hands to prop up his head and her feet to cushion his feet. The confusion comes from the unusual and repeated use of the verb *pukuntatu*, "entered"—hands and feet have entered somewhere or someone, as the tears are entering into her eyes. It is more likely, however, that we are hearing a tone of remorse and self-reproach, not unusual in Chola-period Tamil heroines:[3] Damayanti chose this man for her husband, in the process rejecting his divine rivals; thus she agreed to take his hand (*pāṇi-grahaṇa*) during the wedding ceremony and to follow him in circumambulating the grindstone as part of this same ritual.[4] So again we have a strong suggestion that *entering* and *repeating* are

somehow linked, perhaps to disastrous effect. The eyes also play a critical role: tears, like sleep, enter into them and then, *through* them, more deeply into the seeing self; both verses are focused on this process of seeing. Clearly, moreover, both verses reveal the depth of empathy these two lovers have for one another; each is more concerned with the suffering of the other than with his or her own.

Now Damayanti slips back into sleep, and it is again Nala's turn to wake and watch her.

"Bhima's daughter, the woman
who gave *me* the garland
the gods failed to win,
has only the earth for a cushion
as her fierce eyes close
in sleep, yet no one seems
to be grieving." (265)

Her self-reproach in the previous verse is faintly echoed in this one: Nala married her, and as a result, he thinks, she is reduced to her present state. Even worse, and more amazing, is the fact that no one seems to care. The gods are happy in their heaven, the wilderness is asleep, the world is following its usual course. This thought is so troubling that, in the next verse, Nala shifts into a new and very ominous mode:

His heart never left the good way,
he ruled fairly and ever
did away with evil, yet now
deceitful Kali made that heart
something other, stirring him
to leave his woman. (266)

Whose thought is it anyway, Kali's or Nala's? Kali's impulse seems to come directly out of Nala's own inner monologue or multilogue. Some things, like "rightness" or "goodness" (*cĕmmai*), are never to be abandoned; but a heart disturbed by suffering might just abandon the person who is loved. In this case, the heart becomes other (*veru*),

as if a different persona, or a different organization of the self, had taken over. In the next verse, 267, we learn that some "other awareness" (*ver' or' uṇarvu*) has arisen (*utittate*) in Nala, as when the black light of an eclipse engulfs the sun's red or yellow luminescence. This dark "otherness," operating within, is a dominant chord in Pukalenti's musical score.[5]

How does a person become other than, or to, himself? Why should such a process overtake us or someone very much like us, such as Nala? There are, as always, trivial answers to this kind of question. One might point to the evil tendency of the age we live in, which exacts a price from everyone, especially from the good. Kali, the embodied form of this tendency, who belongs *outside*, stole into Nala when the king made a slight ritual error, leaving a tiny spot on his foot unwashed before prayer (198). Once inside, Kali took over all of Nala's mind (*cintaiy ĕlām/tan vayamey ākki, ibid.*). The next step was the disastrous dice-game, a natural arena for Kali. So kings should not play dice. Look what happens.

In fact, Pukalenti's formulation in the verse just mentioned (198) is anything but trivial. To have one's mind taken over by an alien force that has somehow become the inner self is no cut-and-dried affair. It has no technical remedy. It leaves the self oddly fractured, with residues of the old persona active alongside the new, self-destructive persona, as we have just seen in the midnight forest. So great is the love between these two people that Kali's advantage, even a temporary advantage, looks far from secure. Moreover, whoever Nala may be at this moment, or, however many Nalas are now present, the process itself surely has specific meanings. The poet suggests as much in a verse that nicely frames the triplet with which we began: Nala, newly arrived in the wilderness, wants to catch the golden bird—Kali once again—who has come to taunt him; Damayanti spurs him on to this effect, like Sita sending Rama after the golden deer (247). Nala hopes to trap the bird with the fine cloth he is wearing, and he prepares Damayanti in advance for the possibility that, if things go wrong, they will have to share her single sari. But who, at this point, is this still resourceful royal hunter? Pukalenti describes him as the "lord of the coastal land"

where the white mother conch, battered by the waves,
crawls onto the soft sands of the shore and, in the shade
cast by scattered coral, gives birth to baby pearls
before she flows back to the sea (250).

Historic Nisadha may not have a coastline, but Nala nonetheless epitomizes the movement implicit in this elaborate image. Tamil poetic technique requires this assumption: external features of the landscape regularly replicate internal states in the poetic subject.[6] Without allegorizing the verse, we can offer a minimal abstraction of its tenor. Birth is a matter of moving outward, momentarily, from the wild waters, of taking refuge on the shore and then returning to the sea. To generate the pearl, to bring it forth, the mother[7] follows a certain trajectory across the two domains of land and ocean. She comes out, arrests her progress for a brief moment beneath the coral, opens up, lets the inner treasure out, and returns. Nala, consciously or not, is the master of this topography. He thus emerges, gives birth (but to whom?) and re-submerges himself in the flood. Between flowing out and flowing in, something precious is gained.[8]

Reading a *Venpa* Verse

We have some reason to place Pukalenti at the very end of the Chola period, probably, as stated earlier, in the thirteenth century. A late-medieval tradition, perhaps preserving a faint memory, connects him with the Pandya king Maravarman Kulacekara I (1268–1309).[9] More to the point is the very strong link with Kampan's Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*, probably a twelfth-century work; anyone who knows the two texts can see that they belong to a single semantic universe. Much of what I will have to say about the process Nala and Damayanti undergo in the *Nalavenpa* could apply with equal cogency to Kampan's Rama and Sita, especially in the earlier stages of the latter's story. Moreover, these two analogous poetic psychograms are articulated through very similar poetic means.

What nonetheless distinguishes Pukalenti's work is the set of qualities specific to the *venpa* metre (Kampan uses many distinct varieties of *viruttam*). Pukalenti is the *vĕṇpāpuli*, a veritable "tiger of

the *venpa*," one of the most difficult of Tamil metres,[10] requiring virtuosity on many levels—above all in the manner of connecting the individual metrical feet. Since my argument will posit an isomorphism between the peculiar mechanics of the *venpa* and a generalized progression in the relations between the two main heroes and in their internal states, I pause to outline the workings of this poetic form.

Pukalenti uses a prevalent form of *venpa* known as *nericaivĕṇpā*, which produces verses of four lines each; each verse is split neatly in half (each half is what is called a *kuṟaḷvĕṇpā*) into a first line of four metrical feet (*cīr*) followed by a line of three metrical feet. The two halves are connected by an extra foot, at the end of the second line, known as the "single phrase" (*taṉiccŏl*), which has its own typology. This means that a *nericaivĕṇpā* always and inevitably produces a strong sense of break or gap at the end of the first half of the verse, *before* the connecting phrase (*taṉiccŏl*).[11] Modern printed editions usually signal this gap by inserting a dash or hyphen. The classical theorists of prosody were perfectly aware of the tension built into this kind of verse; there is a moment of real suspense when the first half of the verse is concluded, usually without syntactic closure, and the mind waits to see how the sentence will be resumed. To characterize the *taṉiccŏl* connective, the great medieval commentator Kunacakarar (perhaps late tenth or early eleventh century) uses the image of an alloy inserted in order to facilitate the welding together of two recalcitrant metals.[12] The transition is meant to be relatively smooth. Nonetheless, many stories tell of *venpa* verses left dangling at the end of the first half, the poet lapsing into silence, until a second poet happens by and manages to complete the verse.[13] The image of the alloy is certainly suggestive, but I myself prefer to think of the *taṉiccŏl* as a kind of hinge on which the verse swings back, away from the gap it has opened, toward some level of syntactic or semantic integration. I will return to this image.

There is another critical dimension to the *venpa* which must be mentioned before we can proceed. What gives the form its particular rhythmic character is primarily connected to the mechanics of *taḷai*, the metrical linkages[14] between feet. Only certain combinations are

permitted: a foot ending in a single long metreme (*neracaī*) must be followed by a foot beginning with an short-initial disyllabic metreme (*niraī*); a foot ending with the latter is followed by a mono-syllabic long metreme; in three-metreme feet, a final mono-syllabic, long metreme must lead into a mono-syllabic long initial.[15] If these technical rules sound opaque, try at least to bear in mind the notion of a flowing but somewhat uneven and jumpy rhythm, the natural result of prescribing linkages that require this evident degree of variation and repetition. Moreover, since this kind of *venpa* allows for both two-metreme and three-metreme feet, in relatively free distribution, it is impossible to scan a verse by straightforward musical accent or by stress.[16] Normally, a *venpa* trickles and spurts; or, adapting the metaphors of running or swinging, we could say that it often feels jerky, with small bursts of intensified energy pumping or punctuating forward movement. This metaphoric range is attested in the medieval textbooks, which define three kinds of "rhythm" (*ocaī*) for *venpa*: the "eminent" (*enticaī*), the "swinging" (*tunkicaī*), and the "flowing" (*ŏḻukicaī*), according to whether the verse is composed solely of three-metreme feet, solely of two-metreme feet, or in a mixture of the two,[17] as is almost always the case in Pukalenti. So we are dealing with a text of the "flowing" type which, however, reveals uneven fits and starts. Given the role of the "hinge" phrase, the image of the swing has much to commend it, as I have already suggested. In this sense, we might think of the verse as generally flowing or swinging both forward and backward—across the open gap, through the strong expressive force activated by the hinge.

Finally, we need to note that a syncopation regularly ends the *venpa*: the shortened final line (three metrical feet) brings closure by gathering up the rhythm into a final short, emphatic "burst." Very often this shortened final line also provides the verse with its grammatical subject, so that a somewhat unsettled progression of loosely integrated syntactic units achieves coherence only at the very end.[18] At other times, the final line adds a time clause or other adverbial sequence.[19] It is not difficult to form an impression of this mechanism even without a knowledge of the language; I bring

an example that has also been picked up by the oral literary tradition and woven into a story that tells us something about how Pukalenti's peculiar style was perceived.

Here is Damayanti at the height of her early love-sickness, restlessly rolling and turning on her bed at night, tormented by the moon whose rays, normally so cool, now burn her cruelly. Somewhat accusingly, she addresses her maidservants and companions from the depths of her hallucination:

cĕpp'ilaṅ kŏṅkaimīr tinkaṭ cuṭarpaṭṭuk
kŏppulaṅ kŏnta kuḻirvānaī—ippŏḻutu
mīnpŏtintu ninṟa vicump'ĕṉpa tĕṅkŏlo
tenpŏtinta vāyāṟ ṟĕrintu

Look, my friends with breasts round as burnished
copper pots, the cool sky, burnt by the moon,
is breaking out in blisters—and still,
even now, though you know better,
you insist on honeyed phrases like
"a firmament filled with stars?" (102)

You can see at a glance the variation in two- and three-metreme feet. For example, the final two lines scan as follows (- is a long metreme, = a short doubled one):

- = - / - - / = = / - = /
- = - / - - / = - /[20]

The concluding syncopation should also be clear. I have tried to follow the syntax as best I could in the translation; the verse opens with the long vocative addressed to the maids, followed by the description of the sky with its heat-blisters (accusative). Here we have the break, leaving the reader to wonder what can have turned the sky into an object and left it to suffer its painful sores (like the suffering heroine). Something has skewed and transfigured Damayanti's perception, and it is just here, at the point of transition, that the figure[21] she is articulating becomes most complete and intense—even, we could say, an indication of incipient madness,

normally at home in the gap. Now comes the hinge, the word for "(even) now" (*ippōḻutu*). This "now," which brings the verse emphatically into the present, starts the swing backwards from the farthest limit of the outward arc; in effect, we are brought back to a more or less familiar world, in which the nocturnal sky is, as usual, filled with stars. Of course, this intimately known, thus rather trivial reality has been radically transformed by Damayanti's overheated state. She looks up and sees not stars but blisters; she must be quite certain of this perception, for she somewhat caustically berates her companions for insisting on what can only be, in her view, a poor euphemism and cliché (applied to the dangling object from before the break, the charred and blistered sky, which now fits into the slowly clarifying syntax as accusative to the women's "insisting").[22] The world, inside the heroine and out, has turned hostile, tormenting, and quite surreal. She sees it as it is. The backward arc of the swing never brings you down unchanged toward the point of departure.

Despite its compressed quality, its characteristic jerkiness, and its rather painful point of suspension in the middle, the verse actually has a certain lightness and playfulness about it. Anyone can see the deliberately ironic exaggeration. Probably even Damayanti feels it at some level. The women "know better" (*tĕrintu*), the final phrase of the verse—verbal non-finite fleshing out the main clause (*ĕṉpatu*) by adding the notion of honeyed, i.e., euphemistic, speech (*teṉ pŏtinta vāyāl*). If Damayanti knows that they know better, she may know that she is herself elaborating a hyperbole; thus perhaps she knows better as well. Stars are stars. The moon is not hot but normally cool. The short final line thus effectively casts subtle doubt on the seriousness of the figure. This is highly sophisticated poetry, and every syllable counts. Meaning (particularly figurative meaning) is carried along by syntax and phono-aesthetic touches (note the predominance of *p*'s, *m*'s, and *k*'s, as if to convey acoustically the popping out of blisters). A strong principle of iconicity is operative throughout. The style is musical but strangely choppy, perhaps mimicking the agitation in Damayanti's mind, the flow of feeling and its hidden undercurrents, whirlpools, and riptides. Above all,

there is the open hole in the middle, with its pregnant silence, before the hinge reverses the direction of movement.

One could, incidentally, describe this same syntactic-metrical-figurative sequence as a kind of riddle, beginning with the common superimposition or conflation of levels in the riddle's main figure, which achieves density and a certain opacity before the gap, and culminating in the reverse movement of disambiguation and deflation (the sky has stars, not blisters). The outward arc, that is, poses the riddle, which is solved in the swing back.[23] It is perhaps worth bearing in mind, in this reading, the salience of riddling in the Nala texts generally, including Pukalenti's *Nala-venpa*. On one level, Nala is a riddle that Damayanti has to solve repeatedly. The form this process takes may be intimated in the mechanics of the *venpa* itself. We will return to this theme.

We should not assume that the Tamil literary tradition was prepared to allow such fairly far-reaching, even far-fetched modes of figuration, densely configured in metre and syntax, to go without critical response. In the present case, the critical move is put into the mouth of another poet, Ottakkuttar, seen as Pukalenti's rival at the Chola court. Ottakkuttar is a poet of extreme elevation in diction, with a style generally much more opaque, and rather less lyrical, than Pukalenti's.[24] Hence, in the narrative re-framing of their respective corpora, the two poets are pitted against one another in bitter rivalry. Ottakkuttar loses no opportunity to score points against his quick-tongued (orally improvising?) opponent. So when he hears the above verse in the course of Pukalenti's first oral recitation of the entire *Nalavenpa* in the Chola court (*arańkerṟam*), Ottukkuttar at once objects: "The notion of blisters in the sky is a proper hyperbole" (this much he grants him), "but if you are mentioning blisters, should they not also be oozing pus?" A deft deflation of the heightened mood: suddenly the figure looks ludicrous, as always when hyperboles of this sort are pushed to the extreme. But Pukalenti recovers at once. "No pus, but there is a slight liquid excretion that you can see when mist or dew falls from the sky (at dawn)."[25]

Objections and pseudo-logical answers in this pattern, at once

exposing the silliness of the figure and re-energizing its spin—parodying the parody—structure the field of relations between Ottakkuttar and Pukalenti. Several examples are recorded. Eventually, as we might expect, Pukalenti can take it no more. Utterly frustrated, he decides to kill his rival. With a heavy stone in his hand, he slips at night into Ottakkuttar's house. Ottakkuttar, in despair at his own inferior talent, has taken to his bed. "Even if I hang upside down in penance for the rest of my life, I'll never be able to sing poetry like Pukalenti." Eventually, Ottakkuttar's wife tries to get her husband up to have something to eat. He refuses; he isn't hungry. She presses further: if not rice, let him at least swallow a little milk and sugar. Ottakkuttar is steadfast, also annoyed at the wife's fussy insistence: "No milk, no fruit, no honey, no sugar. For that matter, even if you squeeze all the supernal sweetness out of Pukalenti's verses in the *Nalavenpa*, I still won't swallow it." Pukalenti overhears this sentence and realizes that all of Ottakkuttar's carping critiques have merely masked his rival's true appreciation for Pukalenti's great works; he throws away the rock and emerges to embrace Ottakkuttar, to the latter's confusion and dismay. Pukalenti explains: "Now that I see how much you really like my poetry, I don't have the heart to kill you." With this, he takes his leave.

Listen to what the story tells us. There is sweetness beyond measure in the *Nalavenpa*. Sometimes it is too much—on the verge of the artificial and the ludicrous, maybe even something more than this, a hallucinatory quality that is close to the often agonized mental state of the poem's heroes. Even the poet himself, repeatedly attacked, is pushed to the brink; a life-and-death struggle is going on, as usual when poetry is at stake. Within the terms of this struggle, individual verses trace a pattern, intensifying a figure or a perception to the point of near-madness, then disentangling and deflating the coordinates after a break. Even the poet may have some doubts about the meaning of this process (or the value of his poem). Most striking is the patterned psycho-linguistic movement the verses consistently embody, flowing, leaping, or swinging outward, reaching a limit, falling silent, arcing back.

On Seeing

Pukalenti follows the epic paradigm of the *Nalopakhyana* very closely. Minor differences require little of our attention. For example, Nala's gift from Agni is here to become immune to fire, a boon that serves him at the moment he rescues the serpent Karkotaka (319). More usually, he has the ability to make fire whenever or wherever he desires. The critical riddling exchange between Damayanti and her disguised husband has been subtly reformulated (342–344). There are two extended *kāvya*-style additions: a playful lovers' quarrel immediately after Nala and Damayanti's wedding and journey to Nisadha (187–190), and a mournful soliloquy by the lonely and remorseful Bāhuka/Nala at the seashore (332–336). One has to keep in mind that the dense expressivity of a single *venpa* verse is often enough to sustain or contain an entire episodic moment in the narrative. The semi-critical edition I cite (edited by Srinivasa Aiyar) thus has a mere 405 verses altogether; they suffice to carry the lovers through the entire course of their transformations.

It is here, in the lyrical, heightened, semantically charged depiction of this intricate sequence, that we can see the distinctiveness of Pukalenti's understanding. Like many of the Nala texts, his, too, focuses on the evolving textures of the lovers' relations and on the moulding and unfolding of their inner states. Indeed, perhaps a majority of the *venpas* aim at bringing to the surface some subtle psychic reality, always rich in feeling and vivid perception. We thus have four hundred crystallized vignettes strung together in a familiar narrative chain, tightly linked by consistently repeated figures and other poetic devices. Within this framework, there is consistent significance to the patterns of psychic experience.

To formulate the sequence somewhat abstractly: an initial attack upon the naive integrity of each of the lovers, shattered by desire ("illness"), leads to a state of porous openness to one another, of mutual seeing and knowing, or of a profound interweaving of selves ("health"). But this seemingly optimal mode cannot last; perhaps it is in any case no more than a *Nachtasyl*. Kali enters into Nala and drives him mad; more specifically, he empties him out and

simultaneously closes him in upon himself, thus re-creating him as a violently separate (blind and invisible) "other." Radical physical and emotional alienation ensue in the male, parallel to but in stark contrast with the anguish undergone by the relatively self-continuous woman. A moment of reflection, tied to knowing or learning, cracks open Nala's armor and drives emptiness out; this act of exorcism thus fills him up and reactivates the porous quality of selfhood, at the same time moving him back toward tentative visibility. Another way to describe the process is in terms of the arcs drawn by a swing (or rather two swings), pushing and pulling the two actors in and out of themselves, stretching them beyond themselves, sweeping them away from and then back toward one another. In this latter image, which has a certain linguistic saliency in the text, the critical question has to do with defining the outermost limit of the arc.

We will follow this progression through its four main stages, each of which can be exemplified succinctly: 1) the assault of desire 2) first and second meetings, including the *svayamvara*, the wedding and the consequent achievement of a porous mutuality 3) possession of Nala by Kali and the move into closure and desperate otherness of mind and self 4) reflection, exorcism, and release, with partial recapitulation of stage 2. Framing the series as a whole is a set of repeated figures and images that underlie and give form to its rationale.

Stage 1: As in many Nala versions, here, too, there is an initial sense of the two lovers as self-contained, yet somehow vulnerable, paragons of all that is whole. The goose breaks down their naive complacency. Nala, after hearing the goose describe the supremely lovely Damayanti, rapidly dissolves into crisis: his spirit (*avi*) becomes flacid (*corum*, 38) whenever he imagines her, which is all the time; his heart (*nĕñcam*) splits or shatters (*iṟṟatu*), vast desire (*kātal*) rises within him, his self-confidence (*māṉam*) fails, his natural reserve (*nāṇ*) is destroyed; in short, his entire life is now in the hands, or rather on the tongue, of the goose-messenger that he sends to the princess (40). This disturbed state is illness (*kama-noy*, 44; *maiya 'noy*, 50), deeply disruptive, painful, and confusing, a far cry from the integrated self-sufficiency with which Nala began. As matters

advance, his awareness—the key to the integrity of the personality—leaks out (*uṇarv' oṭa*), his mind splinters (*oṭṭai maṉattoṭu*), he can barely hold on to life itself (*uyir tāṅki*, 63). A process of equal violence takes place in Damayanti, informed by the goose of Nala's qualities. Like all good Tamil heroines, she begins to melt down internally (*akam uruki*, 50); she loses clarity (*mayaṅkiṉāḷ*), stares in stupefaction at her nipples; her body gives up its luster. Desire has seized her inner space with his flower-arrows (*uḷḷaṅ kavara*, 49). All of this fits a well-known template.

Yet much more serious trials are in store for both, as we know. The destabilization of a relatively static inner world is, in itself, a positive achievement in the developmental paradigm set out here. What is, perhaps, less expected is the extreme outward vector that takes over. Nala sets off for Damayanti's *svayamvara* like "one who had lost his mind and was searching for it outside" (73). Listen closely to this simile. This is how Indra and the other gods find him—dissociated, dissonant, and disturbed. With exquisite, deliberate cruelty, they demand that he go as *their* messenger to Damayanti, to persuade her to marry one of them instead of him. Now Nala's crisis intensifies, and the poet lets us watch his torn psyche in its characteristic pendulum movement, back and forth. His heart

moved forward on the gods' mission,
then suddenly turned back,
a shuttle moving through the loom,
toward the woman he loved. (76)

Weaving or, better, interweaving is the dominant trope. The shuttle is part of an emerging pattern in which the to-and-fro movement of the mind is made visible, woven into the fabric of Nala's rapidly self-externalizing story (and in another sense of Damayanti's as well). This image, or the movement it expresses, deserves a closer focus, especially since it recurs in transposed forms at other points in the work. For example, just a few verses later we watch Damayanti slipping this way and that after getting her first glimpse of Nala (who has just entered her palace unseen, with the help of the gods' magic):

uyñcu karaiyeṟa vŏṭṭuṅko lŏṇṭoṭiyāḷ
nĕñcu taṭavu nĕṭunkaṇkaḷ—viñcave
nīṇṭato vaṅṅaṉe yiṅṅaṉe nīṇmalarāḷ
āṇṭatoṇ maṉṉ naḷaku

Her two long eyes
that had touched his heart
grew longer still, studying his beauty
this way, that way, more and more, drowning
in his arms where the Goddess dwells,
his beauty swelling so she could no longer rise for breath
or reach the shore. (82)

We are by now already in stage 2: the two lovers are in the midst of their first long glimpse of one another; they are drunk on each other's beauty, their eyes folding their vision around each other's bodies and actually entering into these bodies in order to engulf and internalize them. I will return to this notion in a moment. Most striking in the verse I have cited is the perfect iconicity of language, metre, and experience: so deep is the interpenetration of personae and perceptions that it is extremely difficult even to disentangle the grammatical subjects of the main sentence and its clauses. The modern commentators reveal their own hesitations in this respect. Is it Damayanti's long eyes that have become even longer (*nīṇṭato*) as they open wide to take in all of Nala's beauty? Or is it this beauty that has extended itself while the eyes swell and fill (*viñcave*)?[26] Uncertainty is built into the syntax along with the ambiguity-marker *–o* (*nīṇṭato*). Maybe it is Nala's physical form, that has swollen and turned liquid like an ocean, that is submerging Damayanti, to the point where she may never surface again. We can, of course, parse the sentence this way or that, making a choice, as readers and philologists must; it is not so difficult after all; but the point to be stressed is the confusion deliberately generated by the syntax, as if embodying in sound or music the intermingling of selves that he is describing. To intensify matters we have the two adverbs *aṅṅaṉey iṅṅane*, "this way, that way," placed contiguously in the third line, explicitly shaking the verse back and forth, rather like the shuttle on

the loom from verse 76. And the ambiguous verb of swelling or filling, *viñcave*, turns out to be the *taṉiccŏl* or "hinge" situated immediately after the open space at the end of the first half of the *venpa*: so there is the inevitable gap, then enough energy to fill it, then the shuttling and restless shaking before we reach, at last, a point of syntactical completion, the final word of the verse, *a̲laku*—(Nala's) "beauty." We have a poem that is in motion, interweaving its hero and its heroine, their attraction, hesitation, and distraction, breaking open and filling itself with their amazement and their desire, and culminating in the sheer physical wonder that has set off all this hubbub in the first place.

Damayanti's eyes have actually "touched his heart" (*nĕñcu taṭavu nĕṭuṅ kaṇkaḷ*).[27] This statement has literal force, for seeing, in medieval Tamil texts, requires precisely such an act of extreme self-extrusion. A subtle energy issues from the eyes and assumes the contours of any visible objects before returning inward.[28] In the case of lovers, we are told many times that this seeing-energy can penetrate a hard surface and wrap itself around the internal organs of the beloved, especially the heart. That is why the first, mutual glance is glossed as *kaḷavu*, "stolen love," hardly different from actually making love sexually.[29] The two perceptual fields are actually winding themselves in and through one another, weaving the two living selves together as they do so. Thus the break-down of the initial self-sufficiency of these two people, through their inward penetration by desire and the consequent outward thrust of selected parts of the self, prepares the ground for a rich intermingling at the moment their eyes meet. Note, however, that this business of seeing and thereby folding the other into the self also requires a return, a swinging back toward the point of origin inside each of the impassioned observers. Sight moves out, enters the other, wraps itself around the innerness of this other, mingles in it, loses something of its initial coherence, but then arcs back to the seeing eye and, passing through it, produces something we could call "perception" inside the perceiver. Seeing is thus in itself imagined as an ellipse or, indeed, a swing. It always reaches a high (or deep) point in its

outward movement, where a change in direction must take place. In this sense, it is close—actually, isomorphic—with the standard progression and internal dynamism of the *venpa*.

Seeing can thus also be understood as enacting possession, a kind of sorcery. The eye draws out the inner being of the other and takes control. To be fully seen is, in this context, potentially to be engulfed or ensorcelled.[30] Impassioned desire, as in the case of these two lovers, fits this description rather well.

There is, however, another element to seeing that comes through clearly in the verse describing the initial seconds of these lovers' first glance (verse 80, just two before the one we have been studying):

The red lotus opened up inside the honey-soaked
blue nymphea, and the nymphea flowered fully
for the red lotus—at that moment
when the prince and the radiant princess
joined sight to sight.

His eyes are the red lotus, hers dark as the nymphea; the two are already deeply inside one another. What is more, they are opening, blossoming, unfolding. The mingling and mixing driven by seeing—a profoundly mutual vision (*potu nokku*) in which each meets the other (*ĕtir nokkum*)—is, we might say, generative and creative. On one level, the whole story of Nala and Damayanti, most famous of Indian lovers, is the tale of just such a creative opening, its mechanism, promise, and subsequent vicissitudes.[31]

As we know, all works out well at first. The *svayamvara* goes off smoothly, thanks to Damayanti's determination. We might conjecture that Damayanti manages to recognize Nala not merely because of the prayer she offers to the "king of fate" (*cūḻ vitiyiṉ mannaṉ*, 149) but also because she has already seen into or through him at least once before. She is also herself undergoing an incipient opening to and mixing into him. The two can now be married, as the process accelerates. They proceed to flow uninterruptedly into and through each other:

One body hid inside the other,
they no longer looked like two
separate people—a king with a fiery spear
and a woman—but more like water
rushing through water. (164)

His wide chest is a paddy field, the saffron paste from her breasts the rich sediment deposited by the overflowing river of her passion (166): more fertile mixing and flooding. So much for stage 2.

Rebound

Inevitably, it seems, we reach this point: a cycle has completed itself. The two lovers have moved from their initially distinct, intact singleness and isolation through a limbo-like zone of disintegration and the outward projection of parts of self, to a renewed self-containment, this time of two people who are no longer two. They are "open" to one another, not in the modern mode that this fashionable phrase might suggest, but in the rather literal sense of an expanded, porous being. This is not a matter of "relationship." A new wholeness of being has been constituted, and once again this being, doubly alive, is seemingly autonomous and impervious to impingement from outside. Perhaps it is this very autonomy and self-sufficiency that draw the attack from without, or *as if* from without. We may take it as a law of the south Indian cosmos that anything whole, to be or remain whole, must take itself apart and re-compose itself on a fuller or higher plane.

So it is, as we know, with Nala, who is entered by the disgruntled Kali when Nala forgets to wash a tiny spot on his foot before the twilight ritual. As we saw, no sooner is Kali inside (*pukuntu*) than he takes over Nala's entire mentation (*cintaiy ĕlām ṯan vayamey ākki,* 198). Listen to the pregnant phrase. Nala's mind is no longer his own. From this point on, a compelling otherness is filtering through the king, driving him to the madness of the dice game (*kaliccūtin māl,* 357). This madness has certain clear features. The imagery suggests that it involves disturbance, like buffaloes stirring up the

muddy waters in the paddy fields (209). It is also a kind of intoxication, as when a person is caught up in play and forgets the outer world. Indeed, this description fits Pukalenti's Nala, at this juncture, all too well; he is becoming closed in upon himself, oblivious of whatever exists beyond the confines of his disturbed mind, obsessed with play and its losses. In another formulation, he is "possessed" in the classic sense of being locked into the increasingly rigid world of autistic emotional or imaginative reality, only tenuously connected to others. Kali, whose own thought has the "texture of stone" (*kaṇ niṟatta cintai kali*, 246), fills him and pushes him into play, although this fullness is actually a kind of emptiness, as we shall see. We could say that the Nala part of the combined Nala-Damayanti whole is retracting or retreating into its own isolated singularity, a theoretically inward-oriented movement that in fact empties out or drains away the Damayanti persona along with those parts of Nala's own self that were open to and mingled into it. Nala, in short, is leaking self, and turning increasingly empty. In another sense, he is possessed by his own isolated, increasingly impoverished and constricted being. He has, we might say, swung shut.

Not all of him drains away. He retains enough self-awareness to keep himself from staking Damayanti in the game, for example (218).[32] At this rather critical moment, he is, in Pukalenti's lyrical phrase, "king of the well-watered land where bees stirring on the mango trees shake open the new buds." Such epithets are rarely incidental. Following the poetic principle of correspondence (*uḷḷurai uvamam*), we may wonder if this sequence, still unfolding and very shaky or unstable, is the necessary beginning to something new. It is thus important to bear in mind that Nala is at no point in this text entirely overwhelmed by the inner forces of Kali. A residual self-consciousness, however painful, animates his actions.[33] Still, his mind (*māṉam*) is rolling or turning like the dice themselves (or rather, to reproduce the simile precisely, *they* are like his mind, 212). We may add this "rolling" (< *puraḷ*) to our cumulating images of the heroes' internal states (fragmenting, swaying or swinging, shuttling, flooding, etc.). And there is one still more powerful idiom, that seems to

subsume all others in its expressive force: Nala, turned in upon himself, made other to himself and to others, driven to abandon his beloved wife in the dark forest, can no longer see her.

He wonders, as we noticed in the verse cited at the start of this essay (263), why his eye does not turn to dust. The whole world has closed its eyes in sleep, even Damayanti and Nala sleep fitfully, awaking to stare at one another in grief. But Nala's ability to see truly is by now deeply impaired. Kali has turned his heart into something "other" (*nĕñcattai ve̲r' ākki ni̲n̲ru*) and agitated him (*kalakki̲n̲ā̲n̲*, 266). The terrible and alien self takes the form of a terrible and alien feeling (*ver' or uṇarvu*, 267). Not a false or superficial cognition but an entirely foreign selfhood has displaced Nala's normal empathy. He cannot understand Damayanti now; cannot bear her continued presence, so heavy with suffering (for which he feels responsible), beside him. He cannot *see* her grief (*kārikai ta̲n̲ vĕn tuyaram kāṇāmal*) and wants only to leave her in the "piercing darkness" (*kūr iruḷ*, 268). His world has gone black. The rich mutuality born of the lovers' first glimpse of one another, with their immediate X-ray like interpenetration via the eyes, is cut in two when he cuts the one remaining piece of cloth they have between them, "like cutting through their single breath of life (*uyir*, 268). Blindness—the failure to see the other in pain—is an act of brutal severing and wounding. The possessed and the blinded literally cut through the subtle field of light and movement in which seeing, that is mutual knowing, can happen.

Not surprisingly, it happens in a forest so dark that "even a young demon could not find his way" (*iḷam peykkun to̲n̲rāv iruḷ*, 256).[34] Again and again in the 150 verses still to come, Nala's act of betrayal is connected to this black midnight moment, as if the darkness were itself the very form that his crime had to take. Nala himself approaches this notion in his heart-wrenching soliloquy by the seashore; in his mad sorrow and solitude, seeking interlocutors of any kind, he addresses a crab he sees on the sand:

"Did you come here to hide in the roaring ocean
just so you would not have to see

this evil man—who left his lover
in the wilderness, in blackest night?" (335)

Darkness everywhere: only in such an hour could this man—who still somehow knows, in his heart, about Damayanti's state (*ava' nilaimai nencil terintan*, 270) or the fate to which he is surrendering her—make both her life (*uyir*) and his own compassion (*arul*), like the torn garment, into something so strange and separate (*ve̲r' āka*, 274). Of course, Kali is coercing him (*nĕñcam valittate*, 272), whatever this may mean. More to the point, his mind is, as expected, swinging or shaking back and forth, like the arms of shepherds churning hot milk into butter or curds (271). In other words, this complex of stark figures, loaded epithets, and emotional implication—intoxication, possession, violent separation, the harsh and stony closing inward that is something like leaking outward, above all the radical blindness that defines the moment as a whole—returns us to the back-and-forth movement of self-doubt, uncertainty and potential transformation. We are, perhaps, at the limit of the arc or swing.

Release

There is an external manifestation of the alien state within: Karkotaka bites Nala so as to "change your body and make you other" (*kāyattai mā̲r' ākki kŏṇṭu...ve̲r' ākkirre̲n*, 327). From this point on, the question of recognition will be central, as in so many of the Nala texts. Damayanti, restored to her parents and her children, sends a Brahmin to seek her husband by reciting half a verse:

Leaving one's beloved
in the black of night
in a desolate spot
while she is sleeping—
is this courage (*tunivo*)? (342)

In actual fact, when the Brahmin recites the verse in Nala's presence, at the court of Rtuparna in Ayodhya, he changes the wording slightly:

"...is this proper for a king?" (*ventarkup potumo*, 344).[35] Nala, guised as the stubby, ugly Bāhuka, rises to the bait:

> Look here: Leaving a bright-bangled woman asleep
> is surely the fruit of ancient fate—no king
> with pearl-studded parasol and garland
> left that golden woman in the cruel forest.
> Have no doubt! (345)

This answer is basis enough for Damayanti to guess correctly that Nala has been found. In effect, Bāhuka has identified himself as the king who would never do what he has done. He is eager to dispel the Brahmin's doubt and seems keen on producing a rationalization, not very convincingly at that. In a wider perspective, it is as if the forbidding exterior that masks his regal inner persona has been cracked open from the outside, very much as when Desire first broke through the self-containment of the young prince, long ago. The hinge—half a riddle—moves the speaker in the direction of an oblique self-identification, on the edge of the doubt that he clearly both feels and resents: Nala, still wandering in the open gap, still locked into himself, alien to himself, has begun to swing open.

But this is only the beginning, still subsumed within the riddling exchange. The critical transition takes place as Nala is driving Rtuparna, King of Ayodhya, to Vidarbha for Damayanti's "second" *svayamvara*—a ruse she has thought up to smoke Nala out, as it were, and bring him to her. Nala considers this a real possibility—"is this the working of karma, approaching its conclusion, or is it just that she wants to *see* me" (353)—but he is far from sure. In fact, as he drives the horses with his supreme skill, at a breakneck pace, "swifter than the imagination of an inexhaustible lover," Nala is deeply contemplating the meaning of Damayanti's action (*mĕl loti tan ceyalait tan manatte terkkinrān*, 356). One can assume that this penetrating cogitation, like at other moments of dramatic reversal in the literature, is one of the keys to the forward movement that can now take place.[36] For the rest, successful exorcism comes from newly gained knowledge (or, more precisely, from the exchange of

two bodies of knowledge, *tŏḷil*, Rtuparna's "heart of the dice" for Nala's "heart of horses"). The poet shows us how this works: Rtuparna, as he suggests the exchange after Nala has counted the one hundred billion (100,000,000,000) fruits of the *tāṉṟi* (*vibhītaka*) tree and found them to correspond exactly to Rtuparna's quoted number, is lord of the land bordering the sea "where peasants herding buffalos raise the sticks in their hands and happen to strike the honeycombs heavy in the dark groves, releasing the sweet honey" (359). Something is about to break open and to flow (again). The two kings, one still disguised, reveal their secrets to one another. Once the new wisdom is inside him, Nala can experience Kali leaving him, "as hunger leaves those poets who celebrate Cantiran Cuvarkki"—Pukalenti's patron, mentioned again at this climactic point (360).

The two verses could hardly be more direct. Nala has been possessed by the alien Kali, who turns out to be akin to a kind of inner emptiness or hunger. Locked into himself, rocky, insensate, physically guised, lonely, guilty, bewitched, and confused, Nala looked full but was "really" empty. The wisdom of counting breaks open the hitherto sealed honeycomb. Such images, by the way, are so common in the *Nalavenpa* as to be a leitmotif of sorts. Honey flows whenever a goose lands on a flower (340), whenever a fish jumps from flowing water onto the dark nymphea (spilling the honey into the mouth of a waiting frog, 328), even when women with flowers in their hair are simply standing by the roadside (the honey soaks and settles the dust churned up by Nala's chariot, 24). In fact, it is precisely this ready flow of honey-like liquid that makes everything fecund and alive (340). Usually it is a matter of unconscious impingement that brings fertility and release. Pukalenti's world is so densely compacted, so luxuriant and alive, bursting with liquid gold, that the slightest touch tends to spill out a latent fullness. Such impinging touch, however, is truly needed if the honey is to flow. This conclusion applies to our two lovers, throughout the whole of their repeated cycles, no less than to any other natural phenomenon.

But the specific juncture in verse 359, where the exchange of knowledge takes place, makes the image still more significant. Touching the honeycomb, releasing the honey—these acts are, themselves, akin to the science of numbers, which makes everything fit and binds each item to those contiguous with it. Whatever the honey touches becomes connected, sticky, sweet. The "heart of the dice" thus contrasts with the mere act of counting one by one (this Nala already knows how to do). It is one thing to enumerate a tedious sequence, another to make all the connections that can and must be made. Connectivity, that is, is sweet and as such opposes the dry or bitter, even terrifying process of retraction and self-encapsulation (Kali closing Nala in upon himself). In all likelihood, the science of numbers that enables Nala to exorcise himself from Kali's grip is a mode of integrating and reconnecting, of opening up to otherness and to the world, of swinging forward, swinging open. There is also reason to think that what makes this esoteric art possible has much to do with the fundamental role of the zero, the potential number that extrudes all others from itself and that binds the others together in infinite combinations. But this is another story, only slightly intimated here.

Is it any wonder that Nala and Damayanti will soon be able to see one another again, not merely in some technical way but with all the active mutuality implied by their first sight of one another? Blindness departs with Kali. Or nearly so:

> She fell at his feet to rid herself
> of the torn cloth she had been wearing,
> of her tears, of the soiled sandal paste
> on her breasts, while *his* eyes flowered
> into tears. (385)

This is a direct response to a request from Damayanti's father, King Bhima, that the disguised charioteer Bāhuka put off his alien guise. The king, incidentally, has already recognized Nala for himself—not by penetrating the strange exterior, but through Bāhuka/Nala's exquisite speech (*nuṇaṅkiyat' or vākkiṉāṉ*, 380).[37] So Nala puts on the cloth that the serpent Karkotaka has given him for just this

occasion, and at once the Bāhuka surface falls away "like karma from those who take refuge at the feet of the god who measured the whole world" (383).[38] It is, in other words, a moment of unconstricted expansion; also, of course, of reconnection and release. Damayanti will be able to bathe, to dress herself and fix her hair, for the first time since Nala abandoned her; more important still, she is, at last, almost ready to stop weeping. He, as if in compensation, has begun to cry. There is something evocative and appropriate, an iconicity without residue, about this exchange of tears. Hers are about to go, his come: this moment is not quite like the "water rushing through water" that we saw at an earlier meeting. Whatever interweaving and flowing of selves will now, again, take over, in some sense we have a new and more differentiated pattern, a complementary alternation in phase. Synchronicity has been left behind, its place assumed by fine calibration, a more livable form of the otherwise entropic force of time as possessive Kali.

Perhaps it is this element of residual blocking that makes the next verse so eloquent:

vĕvviṭatto tŏkkum viḻiyiraṇṭum vīḻtuyilkŏḷ
avviṭatte nītta vavarĕnre—ivviṭatte
vārār mulaiyāḷam mannavaṉaik kāṇāmal
nīrāṉ maṟaittaṉave niṉru

Two eyes, so like fierce poison,
veiled her vision with water
so at that moment she could not see him
or even be sure—
that *he* was the one who had left her
when she was sleeping
once before. (386)

She sees him without fully seeing, as her eyes are clouded with tears. A woman's eyes are always potentially like poison—so beautiful they can kill. Still, the epithet should not be swept aside. Damayanti is certainly still a little angry (probably more than a little). The two lovers are, as it were, seeing one another again, no doubt with the same intensity they had looked long ago; yet the very element that

once epitomized their mutuality here veils their depths from one another. The gods, for their part, can shower flowers, as is customary at such junctures (387), but we are left with a sense that this integrative climax is, in itself, colored by a richer, more painful awareness than at the previous point when a cycle was completed.

The verse itself makes the point in the classic *venpa* mode. There is rhyme: *vĕvviṭattu*, "fierce poison" chimes with *avviṭatte*, "there/before," and *ivviṭatte*, "at that moment" (now). A certain fierceness connects these two temporal points. But the first half of the verse ends with the hope, or knowledge, "that he was the one who had left her when she was sleeping." At this point the sentence breaks down, and the gap takes over, as we have seen from our earlier examples. The *taṉiccŏl*, the hinge bridging the gap, is *ivviṭatte*, the present juncture. So the first half leaves her act of recognition dangling: was this really the man who left her in the forest? The second half makes the doubt explicit: her eyes hide him, won't let her see him. The more severe pathology of blindness that overtook Nala has been replaced by a gentler, yet still troubling variety that affects Damayanti in the first instance, and maybe both of the lovers in what will follow (the verse ends with a suggestion of permanence, *niṉru*). Something has changed after all. The dependable question that dogs Nala through so many versions of his story—"Who is this man (or any man)?"—emerges in this Tamil telling at the very end.

Notice how the verse swings toward recognition and lucid vision and then, reaching the limit of the arc, swings back toward doubt. Here the *venpa* is fully isomorphic with its professed content, hence most effective. One could hardly ask for a more definite demonstration of the iconic principle.

Summary

Damayanti follows an arc of her own, that intersects with Nala's at critical moments like the one just studied. Not identity confusion or possession but outrage and determination govern her trajectory. Still, she is agitated, bewildered, unable to understand how her husband could have left her as he did, at midnight, making her into

some alien being (*piṟitt' ĕmmai*, 283). As always, the phrasing is precise. Her otherness comes not from some force operating within her, overwhelming parts of the self and driving her into madness, but simply and entirely from the partner beside and now mostly outside her. Her anger comes through in the finely formulated riddle that she sends out as the touchstone that will reveal him (342, cited above). Even at the moment of reunion, as we have seen, she oscillates between anger and relief. Or we could say that she sees him again, for who he is, but through a still partly active veil.

Notice that Damayanti repeatedly suffers from Nala's pseudo-knowledge. He thinks he knows what is best for her; he can even advise her to marry one of the gods instead of him; later, he rationalizes his act of desertion, as if it were in Damayanti's best interests. Her knowledge of him, on the other hand, is repeatedly tested. She successfully resists both inflation (the moment when Nala stands beside four divine mirror-images of himself, at the *svayamvara*) and deflation (his appearance before her in the ugly guise of Bāhuka).[39] But this business of seeing straight, of seeing through the distorting surface, is itself a loop swinging Damayanti to an outer boundary and back. She, too, has to see in the generalized sense of penetrating inwards, wrapping vision around the hidden self, and returning with it into the perceiving witness via the eye. She, too, has to see through or beyond the gap, with its hint of potential alteration, to the point of madness, and reversal.

Pukalenti's genius lies just here, in the astonishing adaption of metrical form to a perceptual and emotional process that follows the logic of arc, swing, and hinge. What is whole breaks open and issues outwards, but there is a point at which this outward movement stops, changes direction, and swings backwards. Seeing works in this manner, and so does the *venpa* in the hands of a master. The point of transition is marked by the hinge, the *taṉiccŏl*, restoring movement across the gap. Again and again we experience this arc, this forward opening and retraction, just as the two heroes experience it in two more or less concentric cycles (the second far more painful and intense than the first). And since madness is latent in at least the male segment of this parabola, it is probably the case that the

inner movement of love stretches and pulls the partners *past* their natural limits. In this sense, the outward-oriented vector that produces so strong an interweaving of personae holds within it the madness of the rebound, the retraction into alien being, the closing inwards in possession. Given the strong underlying connection or its re-creation across the ellipsis or silence of the gap—given, that is, the continuous swing, including the moment of turning back—a certain form of generative expansion may come into being under these same conditions. Nala and Damayanti, by the end of the story, even by the end of many individual stanzas, are more full, more porous, somewhat less constricted than they were at the start. Nonetheless, their loving, probably a paradigm for all South Asian lovers,[40] is a matter of repeated acts of swinging open and swinging shut.

We observe an inherent dynamic of swinging out, swinging in; of breaking and reconnecting; of emptying out and filling up; of seeing through (becoming transparent) and going blind (turning opaque). These processes are deeply interdependent, perhaps inherently concurrent. Moving back into a self that is locked in self-possession is a form of emptying, while spilling outward is an indication of innerness that opens to the other. Madness hides, like Kali, almost invisible in the crack, the slight pause at the limit of the arc. This gap is built into the sequence, as is the hinge that restores and redirects movement. But "in" and "out" are thus not two truly contrary vectors; they are more like the arc of the one who is moving through apparent twoness, changing direction, curving back across the gap. The ancient Tamil vocabulary of *akam* and *puṟam*, inside and outside, is thus a statement of direction, never of state; and this directionality includes within it, as its fundamental logic, the contrary movement of the swing, so that going out toward the beloved is in fact the stronger innerness, while retracting inwards into the self is the most alien and external mode.[41]

The verses capture in their very language and music, above all in their fitful rhythm and suspense, this remarkably consistent dynamic. In a sequence of over 400 units, they reproduce it repeatedly. Here, in conclusion, we touch upon what may well be the deeper pattern of this poetic text as it takes its two lovers through cycles of

opening and closing, swinging toward, swinging back, seeing through coupled with autistic blindness. A certain form of knowing is involved in these processes. Damayanti knows what lies beyond surfaces; Nala knows what he has lost; the reader or listener knows something about honey held and released. Nala eventually learns something new, the science of numbers, probably integrally linked to the presence of the uncountable and restless zero, somehow analogous to the ellipsis or gap in the *venpa*. There is madness, the possessive invasion of Kali as time and destructive sequencing, in this gap; but the gap also holds the consistent possibility of finding or becoming something new. For that matter, madness itself is apparently felt to offer something essential to the self-encapsulating, retracting male. Reaching this point, more than once, two people are sent spinning or swinging away from each other. Much, then, depends on the hinge. On the other hand, knowing or seeing—in the presence of the gap—can only be classed as repetition. The two cycles are really superimposed. Nala and Damayanti repeat themselves, much like the *venpa* verses. They are not, however, repeating some theoretical first event. The first moment was itself a repetition. Knowing similarly repeats.[42]

We could also say, following the converging logics of narrative, meter, and psychic process, that knowing is an act of cracking open a surface opacity that almost immediately seals itself off again. Hence Damayanti must repeat her heroic gift for recognition. Even when she cracks open the riddle that Nala poses for her—more precisely, when she cracks *him* open through the riddle she articulates—he himself remains (temporarily, repeatedly) opaque. Such is the very nature of the riddle, which generally opens a slit through which reality becomes momentarily visible (usually in the form of a teasing conflation of domains) and then slams the slit shut by the riddle's deflating solution.[43] Again, this sequence always signals a repetition. Transparent insight issues from and reverts to the opaque.

In Pukalenti's text, this pattern is most conspicuous in the language-bound, meter-specific business of swinging open and swinging shut. Often, as we have seen, a hyberbolic figure serves as the riddle, intensified to the point of near-absurdity on the edge of the hiatus, only to be undermined or unraveled as the hinge shifts the

direction of movement. At other moments, doubt overwhelms an initial moment of recognition when the swing turns back. Knowledge assumes the form of swinging up and down, forwards and back. Note, however, that swinging is, in a sense, *always* a self-repeating reversal, each arc being the reverse of the previous one. Repetition, never exact, rules this field of force. Entropic inertia inheres in the swing, in its very movement: this is Kali, the possessive power of decelerating time, a reality at once intimate and alien to self. Kali slips into Nala through the crack at the limit of one arc, thereby rendering him both blind and opaque. Yet the same crack may allow for change in the opposite direction of opening up, reversing the retraction. And while time-driven inertia is present in all movement, movement itself—any form of movement—is a repeated victory over inertia. As Kali promises Nala at the end of the story (390), whoever hears this text will be free of Kali's predations. Restated in the language that has emerged in this essay: anyone can exorcise himself by letting these Tamil verses swing him across the gap.

Pukalenti tells us as much in the very first verse of the story proper, the frame that brings the field of the narrative into being and that sets a tone. Think of the eye that swings out and back, seeking the other who will become self. Better still, think of four eyes—two dark nympheas, two radiant lotuses. Think of the external movement of impingement that releases what has been contained:

Fish twist and leap,
the nymphea buds burst open
at their touch and the lotus lets go
of its honey—in the land that is first of all lands
circled by the sea, like the eye
of the goddess Earth. (14)

The eye, [*taṉ*]*nāṭṭam*, could also be read as [*taṉṉ*]*āṭṭam*, a dance. The two movements, seeing and dancing, are anyway perhaps the same. Nisadha, Nala's country, is itself, from the beginning, an eye staring outwards, or a restless dance, a swinging out and back. Fish leap, flowers soften the tight grip that keeps them closed inwards (*nĕkiḻa*, *aviḻa*), and honey flows. The two lovers will arc repeatedly

through this course, reenacting its double movement, opening in order to retract, closing in order to crack open again. In this case, the story of Nala as sung by this Tamil poet is, verse by verse, like an eye seeing itself seeing, weaving in or through its field of vision and turning back on itself, but also twisting, leaping, touching, releasing the honey that flows and connects.

Endnotes

1. All citations are from *Nalavenpa*, edited by Aiyar 1960. I have also referred at times to the edition with commentary by Puliyurkkecikan 1983.
2. Cf. Kampan 4.1.40, corresponding very precisely to the figure of this verse.
3. For example, Sita in Lanka: Kampan, 5.3.
4. Thus Srinivasa Aiyar in his commentary.
5. See Shulman 2000 for discussion of Nala in an earlier essay.
6. The principle is referred to as *uḷḷurai uvamam*, creatively translated by A.K. Ramanujan as "inscape," and underlies the entire classical corpus of Cankam poetry and much of the medieval poetic production. For a more complete description, see Ramanujan 1970.
7. Note that the conch is seen as a living being.
8. I note in passing that this verse is a masterpiece of phono-aesthetic expressivity, with a strong suggestion of the enveloping (*valai*) quality of the process it describes, not a straight movement but whorled like the mother conch (*valai*). (Nala will attempt to "envelope" the Kali-bird.) The verse sets the parameters for the forest-scene that directly follows.
9. Zvelebil 1975, 213. Cf. Pantarattar 1957, 11–13, basing himself on a reference in the rather late *Tamil navalar caritai.*
10. "The *venpa* is the commonest, the most difficult in its construction, and the most esteemed kind of stanzaic structure of Tamil classical poetry." Zvelebil 1989:51.
11. This break precisely between the symmetrical halves of the verse is thus far stronger in the *venpa* than the *yati* (caesura) in lines composed in the standard lyrical metres.
12. *Yapp'arunkalakkarikai, urai* on *karikai* 23. In the interests of simplicity, the following discussion rests solely on the *Yapp'arunkalakkarikai* and

its commentary and ignores the earlier metrical discussions. Readers untrained in Tamil are referred to the excellent translation of *Yapp'arunkalakkarikai* and its commentary by Niklas 1993.

13. See, e.g. Rao and Shulman 1998:153, 162–63.
14. I adopt the translation from Niklas, *op. cit.*, iv.
15. The rule is taught in condensed form as *mamunniraiyum vilamunnerun kaymunnerum*. See discussion in Kunacakarar's commentary to *karikai* 10.
16. In pronounced contrast to what obtains in other metres of classical and medieval Tamil poetry. See J. Marr. 1985.
17. Kunacakaran *ad Yapp'arunkalakkarikai* 21.
18. E.g. *Nalavenpa* 60, 203.
19. Often resting on the non-finite form of the verb (*vinaiyeccam*). I have prepared a simple typology of the metrical-syntactic range attested in the final lines of *nericaivĕṇpā*, to be set forth in a more technical essay.
20. Tamil verses are graphically reproduced according to metrical, not semantic, boundaries. The final syllable is technically a *pirappu*, with hyper-short *–u* (=).
21. Technically, an *utpreksa* transferring features from one existential domain to another.
22. For a parallel image, see the verse that appears in some manuscripts of Kampan's *Iramavataram* after 1.631 in the edition cited above (*appuratt' alai kātal*).
23. See analysis of the riddle process by D. Handelman 1996:37–61.
24. Historically, Ottakkuttar probably belongs to a generation or more preceding Pukalenti.
25. Cettiyar 1876: 265–66.
26. For *vincu*, cf. Kampan 3.5.31.
27. It is possible, as Srinivasa Aiyar would have it, that her eyes touch the heart of anyone who sees her.
28. See Handelman and Shulman 2004.
29. The best-known example is the *kaḷavu* pre-marital sequence when Rama and Sita first see one another in Kampan's *Iramavataram*, 1.10.35–38. Sita's spear-like eyes sink deeply into Rama's arms, while his eyes penetrate into her breasts. These glances actually swallow up the other (*parukiya nokku*), and at the same time they are loops or ropes that coil themselves around the inner heart (*ullam*) of each of the lovers and pull this organ outwards; in this way each of them enters

the other's heart repeatedly, by turns (*iruvaru' mārip pukk' itayam ĕytinār*, 37).

30. My thanks to Don Handelman for discussion of this point.
31. In 81, as Damayanti's dark blue eyes touch his, the locked door of her innerness opens. For other examples of the back-and-forth movement in the mind, see 147 (Damayanti at the *svayamvara*, seeing five Nalas) and 271 (Nala leaves Damayanti in the forest).
32. I wish to thank Noa Schwartz for this observation.
33. As is frequently the case with possession; see Shulman in press.
34. *A fortiori*, elderly demons would surely be blinded by the dark. Cf. 122.
35. Also, possibly, "is this enough—for a king." On *potu*, "to be fit, proper," see *Madras Tamil Lexicon*, s. v.
36. Cf. Rama in Lanka when Sita enters the flames, or Yudhisthira in hell: Shulman 2000:57, 298.
37. Damayanti's usual tests of the cook/driver—investigating his culinary skill, his reaction to seeing his two children—have already taken place.
38. i.e. Trivikrama/Visnu, the Dwarf who grew as large as the cosmos.
39. Again I thank Noa Schwartz.
40. Hence, it would seem, the immense popularity of this story.
41. See for a discussion of Tamil ecology, Shulman 2002:11–24 (Hebrew).
42. I thank Irad Kimchi for discussions of this theme.
43. See the Afterword in Hasan-Rokem and Shulman 1996:316–20.

References

1. Nala: The Life of a Story

Biardeau, Madeleine 1984 "Nala et Damayanti: héros épique." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 27: 247–74.

_____ 2002 *Le Mahabharata, tome 1 et 2.* Seuil.

Faizi, Abul Faiz 1982 *Nal'i Daman.* Moscow: Chudoz. Lit.

Hasan-Rokem, Galit, and David Shulman, eds. 1996 *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hiltebeitel, Alf 1999 *Rethinking India's Oral and Classical Epics: Draupadi among Rajputs, Muslims, and Dalits.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Narayan, Kirin 1997 *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Ramanujan, A.K., ed. 1997 *Flowering tree and other oral tales from India.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Smith, John D. 1989 "Scapegoats of the Gods: The Ideology of the Indian Epics." In S. Blackburn et al, eds., *Oral Epics in India,*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 176–196.

_____ 1991 *The Epic of Pabuji: A Study, Transcription and Translation.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Śrīharṣa 1965 *Naiṣadhacarita of Śrīharṣa.* Translation in English. Poona: Deccan College Post-graduate and Research Institute.

3. An Indo-Persian Retelling of Nala and Damayanti

Alam, Muzaffar 2003 "The Culture and Politics of Persian in pre-colonial Hindustan," in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia,* Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 131–98.

_____ 1998 "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics," in *Modern Asian Studies* 32 (2): 317–49.

_____ 2000 "Akhlāqi Norms and Mughal Governance," in Muzaffar Alam, et al., eds., *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributers, pp. 67–95

Alam, Muzaffar, Sanjay Subrahmanyam 2006 "Love, Passion and Reason in Faizi's *Nal-Daman*," in Francesca Orsini, ed., *Love in South Asia: A cultural history*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 109–41.

_____ 2005 "The Afterlife of a Mughal *Masnavi*: The Tale of Nal and Daman in Urdu and Persian," in Kathryn Hansen, David Lelyveld and C.M. Naim, eds., *A Wilderness of Possibilities: Urdu Studies in Transnational Perspective*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 46–73.

_____ 2001 "A Place in the Sun: Travels with Faizī in the Deccan, 1591–93," in François Grimal, ed., *Les Sources et le Temps, Sources and Time: A Colloquium*, Pondicherry: Institut Francais de Pondichery, pp. 265–307.

Alvi, Sajida Sultana 1989 ed. and tr., *Advice on the Art of Governance: Mau'izah-i Jahāngīrī of Muhammad Bāqir Najm-i Sānī, An Indo-Islamic Mirror for Princes*, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Ansari, A.S. Bazmee 1983 "Fayzi," in B. Lewis et al, eds., in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. 2, Leiden, pp. 870–72.

Arshad, A. D. 1967 ed., *Kulliyāt-i Faizī*, Lahore

_____ 1973 ed., *Insha'-i Faizi,* Lahore: Majilis-i Taraqqi-i Adab

Badayuni, Abdul Qadir 1990 *Muntakhab ut-Tawarikh*, Vol. 3, G.S.A. Ranking, tr., New Delhi: Idarah-i Adabiyat-i Delli, reprint.

Desai, Z. A. 1963 "Life and Works of Faidi," in *Indo-Iranica* 16 (3): 1–35, especially 25–27.

_____ 1958a "Nal Daman of Faidi," in *Indo-Iranica* 11 (4): 43–56.

_____ 1958b "The Story of Nala-Damayanti as told by Faidi and its Comparison with the Original Sanskrit Version, Part 1" in *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Baroda, 8 (1): 81–96.

_____ 1958c "The Story of Nala-Damayanti as told by Faidi and its Comparison with the Original Sanskrit Version, Part 2," in *Journal of the Oriental Institute*, Baroda, 8 (2): 183–98.

Hadi, Nabi 1978 *Mughalon ke Malik-ush-sh'ura'*, Allahabad: Shabistan, pp. 81–145.

Kakorwi, Munshi Bhagwant Rai 'Rahat' 1859 *Nal-Daman Hindi*, Delhi: Matba Indian Punch.

Kirmani, Waris 1985 "The Significance of Faizi's Poetry and Its Background," in *Indo-Iranica* 38 (304): 26–35.

Narang, Gopi Chand 1962 *Hindustani Qisson se Makhuz Urdu Masnawiyan*, New Delhi: Urdu Academy.

Phukan, Shantanu 1996 "'None Mad as a Hindu Woman': Contesting Communal Readings of Padmāvat," in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 16 (1): 41–54.

Rahman, Munibur 1999 "Fayzi, Abu'l-Fayz," in Ehsan Yarshater, ed., *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. 9, New York: Columbia University Center for Iranian Studies, pp. 457–59.

Raman, Shankar 2002 *Framing "India": The Colonial Imaginary in Early Modern Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Saravi, Ahmad 1978 *Nal Daman*, Sayyid Muhhammad 'Abdullah, ed., Karachi: Anjuman Taraqqi-yi Urdu.

Shukla, N .S. and S. M. Reza Jalali Naini 1979/80 eds., *Mahābhārat: buzurgtarin manzumah-'i kuhnah-'i mawjud-i jahan bih zaban-i Sanskrit* by Mir Ghiyas-ud-Din 'Ali Qazvini mashhur bih Naqib Khan, Tehran: Kitabkhanah-'i Tavuri.

Shulman, David 1994 "On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala," in *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22: 1–29. Reprinted in Shulman 2001: 131–158.

_____ 2001 *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Shulman, David and V. Narayana Rao 2006 trs. and afterword, *The Demon's Daughter: A Love Story from South India* by Pingali Surana, Albany: State University of New York Press.

Siddiqi, Muhammad Shakil Ahmad 1979 *Amir Hasan Sijzi Dihlawi: Hayat aur Adabi Khidmāt*, Lucknow.

Siddiqui, Md. Taiyab, 1987 ed., *Mathnavi Nal-Daman Faizi*, Patna: Book Emporium.

Tietze, Andreas 1979–82 ed. and tr., *Mustafā 'Ali's Counsel for Sultans of 1581*, Vols. 1 & 2, Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.

Wadley, Susan S. 1999 "A Bhakti Rendition of Nala-Damayanti: Todarmal's 'Nectar of Nal's Life,'" in *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3 (1): 26–56.

4. Nal and Damayanti's Reversals of Fortune: Perspectives on When a Woman Should Know Better

Bennett, Lynn 1983 *Dangerous Wives and Sacred Sisters: Social and Symbolic Roles of High-Caste Hindu Women*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Biardeau, Madeleine 1984 "Nala et Damayanti: héros épique." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 27: 247–74.

_____ 1985 "Nala et Damayanti: héros épique." *Indo-Iranian Journal* 28: 1–34.

Feldhaus, Anne 1995 *Water and Womanhood: Religious Meanings of Rivers in Maharashtra*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gold, Ann Grodzins 1981 "Village Families in Story and Song: An Approach through Women's Oral Traditions in Rajasthan." Indiakit Series, South Asia Language and Area Center, University of Chicago.

_____ 1992 *A Carnival of Parting: The Tale of King Bharthari and King Gopi Chand as Sung by Madhu Natisar Nath of Ghatiyali, Rajasthan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

_____1994 "Sexuality, Fertility, and Erotic Imagination in Rajasthani Women's Songs." In Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*, 30–72. Berkeley: University of California Press.

_____ 1995a "The 'Jungli Rani' and Other Troubled Wives in Rajasthani Oral Traditions." In Lindsey Harlan and Paul Courtright, eds., *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, 92–118. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____ 1995b "Mother Ten's Stories." In Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Religions of India in Practice*, 269–80. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gold, Ann Grodzins and Lindsey Harlan 1998 "Raja Nal's Mistake: Epic Themes in Rajasthani Women's Ritual Narratives." In Jawaharlal Handoo, ed., *Folklore in Modern India*, Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.

Harlan, Lindsey 2003 *The Goddesses' Henchmen: Gender in Indian Hero Worship*. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____ 2000 "Heroes Alone and Heroes at Home: Gender and Intertextuality in Two Narratives." In *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion, and Politics in India*, Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, eds., New York: Oxford University Press.

_____ 1992 *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ingalls, Daniel H.H. 1962 "Cynics and Pasupatas: The Seeking of Dishonor," *Harvard Theological Review* 55: 281–98.

Jamison, Stephanie W. 1996 *Sacrificed Wife/Sacrificer's Wife: Women, Ritual, and Hospitality in Ancient India*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kishwar, Madhu 1996 "Yes to Sita, No to Ram! The Continuing Popularity of Sita in India." Paper presented at the Conference of Gender, Religion, and Social Definition, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Marglin, Frédérique Apffel 1985 *Wives of the God-King: The Rituals of the Devadasis of Puri*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Raheja, Gloria Goodwin 1995 "'Crying When She's Gone and Crying When She Goes Away': Marriage and the Idiom of the Gift in Pahansu Song Performance." In Lindsey Harlan and Paul Courtright, eds., *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, 19–59. New York: Oxford University Press.

Reynolds, Holly Baker 1980 "The Auspicious Married Woman," in Susan S. Wadley, ed., *The Powers of Tamil Women*, South Asia Series, no. 6: 35–60. Syracuse University.

Sharma, Ram Ji "Dasarani ki Vrat Kathā." Allahabad: Shri Durga Pustak Bhandar.

Shulman, David D. 1994 "On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1):1–24.

Smith, John D. 1992 "The Hero as Gifted Man: Nala in the *Mahabharata*." In Christopher Shackle and Rupert Snell, eds., *The Indian Narrative: Perspectives and Patterns*, 13–32. Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Van Buitenen, J. A. B. trans. and ed. 1975 *The Mahābhārata*, vol. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wadley, Susan Snow 2004 *Raja Nal and the Goddess: The North Indian Oral Epic Ḍholā in Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

5. Damayanti's String: Epic Threads in Women's Ritual Stories

Doniger, Wendy 1999 *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gold, Ann Grodzins 1988 *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

_____ 1992 *A Carnival of Parting*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

_____ 1995a "The 'Jungli Rani' and Other Troubled Wives in Rajasthani Oral Traditions." In Lindsey Harlan and Paul Courtright, eds., *From the Margins of Hindu Marriage: Essays on Gender, Religion, and Culture*, 119–36. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____ 1995b "Mother Ten's Stories." In Donald S. Lopez, Jr., ed., *Religions of India in Practice*, 434–48. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

_____ 1996 "Khyal: Changed Yearnings in Rajasthani Women's Songs." *Manushi* 95:13–21.

_____ 2000 "From Demon Aunt to Gorgeous Bride: Women Portray Female Power in a North Indian Festival Cycle." In Julia Leslie and Mary McGee, eds., *Invented Identities: The Interplay of Gender, Religion and Politics in India*, 203–30. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Gold, Ann Grodzins, and Lindsey Harlan 1998 "Raja Nal's Mistake: Epic Themes in Rajasthani Women's Ritual Narratives." In Jawaharlal Handoo, ed., *Folklore in Modern India*, 151–62. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.

Handelman, Don, and David Shulman 1997 *God Inside Out: Siva's Game of Dice*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Harlan, Lindsey 1992 *Religion and Rajput Women: The Ethic of Protection in Contemporary Narratives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keyes, C.F. and E.V. Daniel, eds. 1983 *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lalas, Sitaram 1962–1978 *Rajasthani Sabad Kos* (9 volumes). Jodhpur: Rajasthani Shodh Sansthan.

Narayan, Kirin with Urmila Devi Sood 1997 *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon: Himalayan Foothill Folktales*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pearson, Anne M. 1996 *"Because it Gives me Peace of Mind": Ritual Fasts in the Religious Lives of Hindu Women*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Raheja, Gloria Goodwin and Ann Grodzins Gold 1994 *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ramanujan, A.K. 1986 "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore." In Stuart Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan, eds., *Another Harmony*, 41–75. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shulman, David 1994 "On being human in the Sanskrit Epic: The riddle of Nala." *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22 (1): 1–24.

Unni, N.P. 1977 *Nala Episode in Sanskrit Literature*. Trivandrum: College Book House.

Wadley, Susan S. 1983 "Vrats: Transformers of Destiny." In Val Daniel and Charles Keyes, eds., *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*, 147–62. Berkeley: University of California Press.

——— 1999 "A Bhaktī rendition of Nala-Damayanti: Todarmal's Nectar of Life." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3: 1–29.

Wadley, Susan S. and Bruce W. Derr 1990 "Eating Sins in Karimpur." In McKim Marriott, ed., *India Through Hindu Categories*, 131–48. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

6. Pandvani Heroines, Chhattisgarhi Daughters

Bakhtin, M. M. 1986 "The Problem of Speech Genres." In *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas.

Blackburn, Stuart H. and A.K. Ramanujan, eds. 1986 *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter 1996 *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

——— 1991 "Literacy and the Changing Concept of the Text: Women's *Ramayana Mandali* in Central India." In Joyce B. Flueckiger and

Laurie J. Sears, eds., *Boundaries of the Text: Epic Performances in South and Southeast Asia*. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.

Lutgendorf, Philip 1991 *The Life of a Text: Performing the* Rāmcaritmānas *of Tulsidas*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sax, William 1991 "Ritual and Performance in the Pandavalila of Garhwal." In Arvind Sharma, ed., *Essays on the Mahabharata*. Leiden: E. J. Brill.

Smith, John 1980 "The Two Sanskrit Epics." In A.T. Hatto, ed., *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry*, Vol. 1. London: Modern Humanities Research Association.

Van Buitenan, J.A.B., ed. and trans. 1975 *The Mahābhārata: 3. Book of the Forest.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

7. Raja Nal's *Purāṇa* and the Jat Kingdoms of Braj

Bender, Ernest 1951 The *Nalarayadavadanticarita* (*Adventures of King Nala and Davadanti*). New Series Volume 40, Part 4. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.

Blackburn, Stuart, et. al., eds. 1989 *Oral Epics in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Briggs, George W. 1920 *The Chamars*. London: Oxford University Press.

Crooke, William 1896a *Tribes and Castes of the North-western Provinces and Oudh*. 4 vols. Volume III. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government, Printing, India.

_____ 1896b *Tribes and Castes of the North-western Provinces and Oudh*, vol II. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, India.

Dwivedi, Girish Chandra 1989 *The Jats: Their Role in the Mughal Empire*. New Delhi: Arnold Publishers.

Entwistle, Alan W. 1987 *Braj: Centre of Krishna Pilgrimage*. Groningen: Egbert Forsten.

Erndl, Kathleen M. 1993 *Victory to the Mother: The Hindu Goddess of Northwest India in Myth, Ritual, and Symbol*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ganguli, Kalyan Kumar 1983 *Cultural History of Rajasthan*. Delhi: Sundeep Prakashan.

Gold, Ann Grodzins 1993 *A Carnival of Parting, the Tales of King Bharthari*

and King Gopi Chand as sung and told by Mathdu Natisar of Ghatiyali, Rajasthan. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goswamy, B. N. 1975 *Pahari Paintings of the Nala-Dumenti Theme in the collection of Dr. Karan Singh*. New Delhi: National Museum.

Gramsci, A. 1985 *Selections from Cultural Writings*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Grierson, George A. 1890 "A Grammar of the dialect of Chhattisgarh in the Central Provinces." In *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* 59(2):101–53.

Goudriaan, T. and S. Gupta 1981 *Hindu Tantric and Sakta Literature*. Wiesbaden, Otto Harrowitz.

McGregor, Ronald Stuart 1984 *Hindi Literature to the Nineteenth Century*. Wiesbadden: Otto Harrowitz.

Mukta, Parika 1994 *Upholding the Common Life: The community of Mirabai*. New York: Oxford Univeristy Press.

Myerhoff, Barbara and Marc Kiminsky 1992 *Remembered Lives: The Work of Ritual, Story telling and Growing Older*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Narayan, Kirin 1989 *Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels: Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

_____1997 *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Prasad, Pandit Lakshman 1890 *Dhola Maru Nal ki Sagai*. Agra.

Qanungo, Kalika Rajan 1925 *History of the Jats, vol. 1: To the Death of Mizra Najaf Khan*, 1782. Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons.

_____1960 *Studies in Rajput History*. Delhi: S. Chand & Co.

Raheja, Gloria Goodwin and Ann Grodzins Gold 1994 *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rushdie, Salman 1994 *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. London: Granta Books.

Sahai, Babu Jwala 1898 *History of Bhurtpore*. Calcutta: Patrika Press.

Schomer, Karine 1989 "Paradigms for the Kali Yuga: The heroes of the *Alhā* epic and their fate." In Stuart H. Blackburn, et. al., eds., *Oral Epics in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scott, James 1990 *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Sharma, Satyaprakash 1992 "*Braj kā lok mahākāvya: Ḍholā*." In Kailash Chandra Bhatiya, Radheshayam Agrawal, Mohan Swarup Bhatiya, eds., *Brajlok*. Mathura: Braj Kala Kendra, pp. 128–36.

Spear, Thomas George Percival 1951 *Twilight of the Mughuls: Studies in late Mughul Delhi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stokes, Maive 1880 *Indian Fairy Tales*. London: Ellis and White.

Thornhill, Mark 1884 *The Personal Adventures and Experiences of a Magistrate during the Rise, Progress and Suppression of the Indian Mutiny*. London: John Murray.

Tod, James 1971a *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*. Volume II. New Delhi: K. M. N. Publishers.

_____ 1971b *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*. 2 vols. Volume I. New Delhi: K.M.N. Publishers.

Todarmal 1879 *Nalcaritamrit arthat Dholamaru*. Mathura.

_____ 1975 *The Real Dhola Maru*. Mathura, Delhi: Venkateshwar Pustakalaya.

Varma, Thakur Jaharsingh 1883 *NalaDumenti kī kathā*. Agra: Mohan La's Vidysagar.

Vaudville, Charlotte C. 1962 *Les Duha de Dhola Maru, une ancienne ballade du Rajasthan*. Pondicherry, Publications de l'institut Francais d'indologie.

Wadley, Susan S. 1978 "Texts in Contexts: Oral Traditions and the Study of Religion in Karimpur." In S. Vatuk, ed., *American Studies in the Anthropology of India*. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 309–41.

_____ 1989 "Choosing a Path: Performance Strategies in the North Indian Epic *Ḍholā*." In Stuart Blackburn, et. al., eds., *Oral Epics in India*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 75–101.

_____ 1999 "A Bhaktī rendition of Nala-Damayanti: Todarmal's Nectar of Life." In *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 3: 1–29

_____ 2004 *Raja Nal and the Goddess: The North Indian Oral Epic Ḍholā in Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Williams, Richard 1976 "*Dhola-maru ra Duha* and the rise of the Hindi literary tradition." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago.

Zvelebil, Kamil V., trans. 1987 *Two Tamil Folktales: The Story of King Matanakama; the Story of Peacock Ravana*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

8. The Performative Context of Nala in Late Medieval Kerala

Ajayakumār, N. 1999. Navotthānavum Nalacaritattinre Raṅgapracāravum. In *Aññuṟu Varṣatte Keraḷam: Cila Aṟivaṭayāḷaṅṅaḷ: Saṃskārapaṭhaṇam*, edited by V.J. Vargīs and N. Vijayamohanpiḷḷa. Ceṅṅanaśeri: Association for Comparative Studies; Distributors, Current Books, pp. 233–44.

Anonymous. 1951. *Naḷacaritam Kiḷippāṭṭu*. Kollam, Kerala: Rāmavilāsam Press.

Appukuṭṭanpiḷḷa, Cavaṟa. 1996. *Kathakaḷiyile Manodharmaṅṅaḷ*. Trivandrum, Kerala: State Institute of Languages.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. 1984. *Rabelais and his World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bauman, Richard, and Charles Briggs. 1990. Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life. *Annual Reviews in Anthropology* 19:59–88.

Freeman, Rich. 1998. Rubies and Coral: The Lapidary Crafting of Language in Kerala. *Journal of Asian Studies* 57 (1):38–65.

Freeman, Rich. 2002. 'Hindu Literature in Malayalam', in *A Companion to Hinduism*. Gavin Flood, ed. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Freeman, Rich. 2003. Genre and Society: The Literary Culture of Pre-Modern Kerala. In *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, edited by S. Pollock. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fuller, C.J. 1976. *The Nayars Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gaṇeś, K.N. 1996. *Kuñcan Nambyār: Vākkum Samūhavum*. Śukapuram: Vaḷḷattoḷ Vidyāpīṭham.

Goodwin, Charles, and Alessandro Duranti. 1992. Rethinking Context: An Introduction. In *Rethinking Context: Language as an Interactive Phenomenon*, edited by A. Duranti and C. Goodwin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gopalakrishnan, Sudha, trans. 2001. *Unnayi Varier's Nalacaritam with Performance Manual Based on Kalamandalam Krishnana Nair's Stage Version*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi.

Gopālakṛṣṇan Nāyar, M., ed. 1990. *Uṇṇiyaccīcaritam*. Trivandrum, Kerala: State Institute of Languages.

Gough, Kathleen. 1961. Nayar: Central Kerala; Nayar: North Kerala;

Tiyyar: North Kerala; Mapilla: North Kerala. In *Matrilineal Kinship*, edited by D. Schneider and K. Gough. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hanks, W. 1987. Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice. *American Ethnologist* 14 (4):688–692.

Kaṇṇan, Errumānūr P. 2001. Kathayaṟiyātta Iḷakiyāṭṭam. *Mātṛbhūmi Āḻcappatippu* 79 (35):34–38.

Kṛṣṇakkaimaḷ, Aymanam. 1989. *Āṭṭakathāsāhityam*. Trivandrum, Kerala: State Institute of Languages.

Kunjunni Raja, K. 1964. *Kutiyattam*. New Delhi: Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Lienhard, S. 1984. *A History of Classical Poetry: Sanskrit—Pāli—Prakrit*. In *A History of Indian Literature*, edited by J. Gonda. Vol. III; Fasc. 1. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Maḻamaṅgalam. 1967 [1934]. *Bhāṣānaiṣadha Campū*. Commentary by Pāṭṭattil Padmanabhamenon. Kottayam: National Book Stall.

Mencher, Joan P., and Helen Goldberg. 1967. Kinship and Marriage Regulations among the Namboodiri Brahmans of Kerala. *Man (N.S.)* 2:86–106.

Nārāyaṇan, Akavūr. 2001. Mikavēṟunnoru Mēḷappadam. *Mātṛbhūmi Āḻcappatippu* 79 34:18–21; 52–54.

Prasannamaṇi, V. 1986. *Naḷakatha Malayāḷattil*. Kottayam: National Book Stall.

Rāmacandran Nāyar, Panmana. 1987. *Naiṣadhavum Naḷacaritam Āṭṭakkathayum*. Kottayam: National Book Stall.

Rāmacandran Nāyar, Panmana. 2001. *Naḷacaritam Āṭṭakatha—Kairaḷīvyākhyānavum Āmukhapaṭhanavum*. Kottayam: Current Books.

Śarma, V.S. 1976. *Eḻupattañcu Tuḷḷalkkathakaḷ*. Kottayam, Kerala: D.C. Books.

Scott, James. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shulman, David. 1994. On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala. *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22:1–29.

Śrīharṣa. 1965. *Naiṣadhacarita of Śrīharsa*. Translated by K.K. Handiqui. Poona: Deccan College Postgraudate and Research Institute.

Śrīharṣa. 1986. *Naiṣadhīyacaritam*. Edited by N.R. Ācārya. Daryaganj, New Delhi: Meharchand Lachhmandas Publications.

Sukthankar, V.S., ed. 1942. *The Mahābhārata, Volume 3: Āraṇyakaparvan (Part 1)*. Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental research Institute.

Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the Self.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Uḷḷūr, S. Parameśvarayyar. 1954. *Keralasāhityacaritram.* Vol. 2, *Travancore University Series No. 30.* Trivandrum, Kerala: University of Travancore.

Uḷḷūr, S. Parameśvarayyar. 1955. *Keralasāhityacaritram.* Vol. 3, *Travancore University Series No. 30.* Trivandrum, Kerala: University of Travancore.

Uḷḷūr, S. Parameśvarayyar. 1979. Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ. In *Uḷḷūrinde Prabandhaṅṅaḷ,* edited by V. S. Sharma. Trivandrum: Kerala University.

Uṇṇāyivāriyar. 1962. *Naḷacaritam (Āṭṭakatha).* Edited by I. Kuññanpiḷḷa. Kottayam: National Book Stall.

van Buitenen, J.A.B., trans. and ed. 1975. *The Mahābhārata, Vol. 2: The Book of the Assembly Hall. The Book of the Forest.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Veṅkiṭṭarāma Śarmma, V., ed. [1967] 1982. *Bhāṣārāmāyaṇa Campu.* Trichur, Kerala: Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

Venu, G. 1989. *Production of a Play in Kūṭiyāṭṭam: Abhiṣekanāṭakam, Documentation of Kūṭiyāṭṭam Series No. 1.* Trichur: Natanakairali.

Warder, A.K. 1972. *Indian Kavya Literature.* Vol. 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Warder, A.K. 1988. *Indian Kavya Literature.* Vol. 5. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Warrier, Unnayi. 1977. *Nalacharitham.* Translated by V. Subramania Iyer. Trichur: Kerala Sahitya Akademi.

Zvelebil, Kamil. 1974. *Tamil Literature.* In *A History of Indian Literature,* edited by J. Gonda. Vol. X; Fasc. 1. Wiesbaden: Otto Harssowitz.

9. Nala's Weakness and Damayanti's Powers: Jain Tellings of the Great Love Story

Bender, Ernest, ed. and trans. 1951 "The *Nalarāyadavadantīcarita* (Adventures of King Nala and Davadantī)." In *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society.* Philadelphia, March 1951, pp. 265–372.

Caudharī, Gulabacandra 1973 *Jain Sāhitya kā Bṛhad Itihās,* Vol. 6. Vārāṇasī: Pārśvanāth Vidyāśram Śodh Sansthān.

Cort, John E. 1993 "An Overview of the Jaina *Purāṇas.*" In Wendy Doniger, ed., *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts.* Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 185–206.

——— 2001 *Jains in the World.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Dave, Vasantrāy 1993 "Kavi Samayasundar." In Jayant Koṭhārī and Kāntibhāī B. Śāh, eds., *Madhyakālīn Gujarātī Jain Sāhitya*. Mumbai: Śrī Mahāvīr Jain Vidyālay, pp. 165–72.

_____ 1998 *Kavi Samayasundar: Ek Abhyās*. Amadāvād: Śaradāben Cīmanbhāī Ejyukeśanal Risarc Seṇṭar.

Dhāmī, Vimalkumār Mohanlāl 1998 *Soḷ Mahāsatīyo*. Rajkot: Navyug Pustak Bhaṇḍār.

Dundas, Paul 2000 "The Meat at the Wedding Feasts: Kṛṣṇa, Vegetarianism and a Jain Dispute." In J. T. O'Connell, ed. *Jain Doctrine and Practice: Academic Perspectives*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 95–112.

_____ 2002 *The Jains*. London: Routledge.

Fohr, Sherry 2001 "Gender and Chastity: Female Jain Renouncers." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Virginia.

Granoff, Phyllis, ed. and trans. 1998 *The Forest of Thieves and the Magic Garden: An Anthology of Medieval Jain Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin Classics.

Jaini, Padmanabh S. 1993 "Jaina *Purāṇas*: A Purāṇic Counter Tradition." In Wendy Doniger, ed., *Purāṇa Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 185–206.

Johnson, Helen M., ed. and trans. 1962 *The Deeds of the Sixty-three Illustrious Persons*. (Hemacandra's *Triṣaṣṭiśalākapuruṣacaritram*), Vol. V. Baroda: Oriental Institute.

Kelting, M. Whitney 2009 *Heroic Wives: Rituals, Stories, and the Virtues of Jain Wifehood*. New York: Oxford University Press.

_____ 2006 "Thinking Collectively About Jain *Satīs*." In P. Flügel, ed., *Doctrines and Dialogues: Studies in Jaina History and Culture*. London: Routledge Curzon Press.

_____ 2003 "Constructions of Femaleness in Jain Vernacular Devotional Literature." In O. Qvarnström, ed. *Festscrift for Professor Padmanabh S. Jaini*. Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press.

_____ 2001 *Singing to the Jinas: Jain Laywomen, Maṇḍal Singing, and the Negotiations of Jain Devotion*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Madhukarmuni, Yuvācārya Śrī 1980 *Jain Kathāmālā*, Vol. 1. Ābu: Śrī Vardhamān Mahāvīr Kendra.

Mahendrakumār (Pratham) 1971 *Jain Kahaniyā*, Vol. 17. Dillı: Ātmārām and Sons.

Maheta, Candrakānt 1993 "Nayasundar." In Jayant Koṭhārī and Kāntibhāī B. Śāh, eds., *Madhyakālīn Gujarātī Jain Sāhitya*. Mumbai: Śrī Mahāvīr Jain Vidyālay, pp. 161–64.

Reynell, Josephine 1991 "Women and the Reproduction of the Jain Community." In Michael Carrithers and Caroline Humphrey, eds., *The Assembly of Listeners: Jains in Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 41–65.

Sahā, Pu. Vātsalyamürti and Sārvodayāśrī M. Sahā 1994 *Jina Śāsananāṃ Śramaṇīratno*. Bhāvnagar: Arihant Prakāśan.

Śrī Jain Sajjhāy Mālā (Sacitra) Amdāvād: Jaśavantlāl Girdharlāl Śāh. (Samvat 2025).

Śrī Pañca Pratikramaṇ Sūtra (Gujarati edition) Amdāvād: Jain Prakāśan Mandīr.

Śrī Sudhāras Stavan Saṅgrah Amadāvād: Śrī Jain Prakāśan Mandir.

Śrī Virāṭ (Ācārya Śrī Viśālasenasurīśvarjī) 1992–1993 *Upadeśaprāsād Mahāgranth*, Vol. 4. Palitana: Shree Virat Prakashan Mandir.

Tawney, C.H., ed. and trans. 1895 *The Kathākoça or Treasury of Stories*. London: Royal Asiatic Society.

van Buitenen, J.A.B., trans. and ed. 1975 *The Mahābhārata: 2. The Book of the Assembly Hall, 3. The Book of the Forest*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

10. Leaving Damayanti Again (and Again): Jain Retellings of the Nala Story

Granoff, Phyllis 1994 "Life as Ritual Process." In Phyllis Granoff and K. Shinohara, eds., *Other Selves: Autobiography and Biography in Cross-cultural Perspective*. Oakville, Ontario: Mosaic Press.

_____ 1998 *The Forest of Thieves and the Magic Garden: An Anthology of Medieval Jain Stories*. New Delhi: Penguin.

_____ 2001 "My rituals and my gods: Ritual Exclusiveness in Medieval India." *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 29 (1–2):109–131.

Jaini, Padmanabh S. 1993 "Jaina Puranas: A Puranic Counter Tradition." In Wendy Doniger, ed., *Purana Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jain Texts*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 207–251.

Kubba, Raj Kumari 1982 *Krishna-kavya in Sanskrit Literature*. Delhi: Eastern Book Lingers.

Sarma, S. N. 1972 *Epics and Puranas in Early Assamese Literature.* Calcutta: Purbodaya Press.

Smith, W.L. 1999 "The *Jaiminibharata* and its Eastern Vernacular Versions." In *Stuida Orientalia,* 85, 389–406.

_____ 2000 "The Vaisnava Parvan of the Assamese Mahabharata." In Mariola Offredi, ed., *The Banyan Tree: Essays on Early Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages,* Volume II, 343–350. New Delhi and Venice: Manohar.

Sankaradeva 1995 *Sri Sankara Bakyamrta.* Gauhati: Dutta Baruha and Company.

Somaprabhasuri 1920 *Kumarapalapratibodha.* Jina Vijaya Muni, ed. Baroda: Gaekwad's Oriental Series.

Tawney, C.H., ed. and trans. 1895 *The Kathākoça or Treasury of Stories.* London: Royal Asiatic Society.

Vishnu S., S.K. Belvalkar, P.L. Vaidya Sukthankar 1933 *The Mahabharata, for the First Time Critically Edited.* Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute.

11. Nala Unhinged: Pukalentippulavar's *Nalavenpa*

Aiyar, L. Srinivasa 1960 *Nala-venpa.* Madras: U.Ve. Caminataiyar Library.

Cettiyar, Viracami 1876 *Vinotaracamancari.* Madras: Vittiya Ratnakaram Press.

Handelman, Don 1996 "Traps of Transformation: Theoretical Convergences between Ritual and Riddle." In Hasan-Rokem and D. Shulman, eds., *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and other Enigmatic Modes.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Handelman, Don and David Shulman 2004 *Siva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay in Sorcery and Self-knowledge.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Hasan-Rokem, Galit and David Shulman, eds. 1996 *Untying the Knot: On Riddles and Other Enigmatic Modes.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Niklas, Ulrike 1993 *Yapp'arunkalakkarikai.* Pondicherry: Institut francais de Pondicherry.

Pantarattar, T.V. Cadaciva 1957 *Tamil ilakkiya varalaru.* Annamalainagar: Annamalai University.

Puliyurkkecikan 1983 *Nala-venpa*. Madras: Pari nilayam.

Ramanujan, A.K. 1970 *The Interior Landscape*. London: Peter Owen.

Rao, V. Narayana and D. Shulman 1988 *A Poem at the Right Moment: Remembered Verses from Premodern South India*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Shulman, David 2000 "On Being Human in the Sanskrit Epic: The Riddle of Nala," in *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 131–58.

_____ 2002 "Suga be-suga asuya," in N. Wasserman, *Hutim Nitvim*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, pp. 11–24. (Hebrew)

_____ 2006 "Toward a New Theory of Masks," in D. Thiagarajan and D. Shulman, eds., *Masked Ritual in Performance*. Ann Arbor: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies.

Viracami Cettiyar, *1876 Vinotaracamancari*, Madras: Vittiya Ratnakaram Press, pp. 316–20.

Zvelebil, K. 1975 *Tamil Literature*. Leiden: Handbuch der Orientalistik.

_____ 1989 *Classical Tamil Prosody: An Introduction*, Madras: New Era Publications.

Index

Abu'l Faiz ibn Mubarak (Faizi) 12, 38–52, 54, 57, 59, 60, 62, 63, 65, 69, 71, 72, 76–79
Afghan 39, 167, 168
Agni 18, 294
Agra 41, 42, 157, 166, 167, 168
Ajmer 109, 110, 118–126
Akbar 6, 39–43, 46, 51, 54, 71, 167
Ālhā 159, 181–183
Allahabad 92, 98, 99
alms 87, 94, 95, 101, 247, 259
Amir Khusrau 41, 44
Arjuna/Arjun 145, 266, 267
ascetic 54, 83, 94, 101, 248, 249, 254, 270
Assamese 265, 274, 275, 278, 279
Aurangzeb 166, 167
autumn (*khizān*) 69
Ayodhya 27, 29, 30, 34, 35, 136, 137, 219, 303, 304

Badan Singh 167, 168
Badayuni 43, 44
Bahubali 244, 245, 261, 262, 263
Bāhuka/Bahuka 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 66–69, 77, 294, 304, 306, 307, 309
Bakhtin 140, 183, 203, 226, 230
balance (*tawazun*) 55
balance (*i'tidal*) 63
Balarama 244, 275, 276
Basuk 161, 162
beauty (*husn*) 14, 27, 40, 45, 48–51, 53, 59, 62, 73–75, 135, 148, 195, 199, 244, 250–252, 255, 272, 297, 298
Behmata 171, 172
beloved (*ma'shūq*) 6, 45–47, 49, 55–58, 69, 70, 76, 78, 212, 266, 278, 298, 302, 303, 310
Bengal 174
Bhāgavatapurāṇa 274, 275, 277–279
bhajans (devotional hymns) 150, 151
bhakti 100, 150–153, 174, 183
Bhamartal 163, 175, 177

Bhārahesara nī Sajjhāy 245
Bhārateśvara Bahubali Vṛttiḥ 245, 262
Bharat 244, 261
Bharatpur 156, 157, 158, 166–169
Bhāṣā Naiṣadha Campu 11, 193, 194, 196, 199, 207
Bhāṣā Rāmāyaṇa Campu 197, 198, 203
Bhīma/Bhim 13, 14, 30, 31, 32, 34, 35, 145, 162, 213, 214, 228, 229, 232, 233, 250, 251, 253, 254, 276, 285, 306
Bhīṣmaka 275, 276, 278
Bidar 54, 61, 67, 68
Braj 155, 157, 160, 166, 168, 171, 175, 182, 183
Brahma 211, 214, 276
brahminical Hinduism 97, 98, 171
Bṛhadaśva/Brihadasva 4, 13, 36, 135, 267–269, 273
Brindavan 150, 152
British 168, 169
Buddha 46
Budh Singh 163, 172, 175–182

campu 191–194, 196–201, 203–205, 207, 211, 218, 223, 231
Candaini 130, 131. 134, 137–147, 149, 152,
caste 188–192, 202–206, 217, 219, 225, 231, 235,
  Acrobat (Nats) 173, 174, 182
  Ahirs 166, 170
  Ambalavāsi 189, 190
  avarṇṇa 189
  Bhil 251,
  Brahmin 13, 18, 19, 25, 27–29, 34, 46, 47, 53, 56, 60, 66, 67, 69, 78, 84, 109, 110, 115, 118, 132, 140, 161, 169, 172, 183, 189–191, 193, 196, 202–206, 218, 219, 222, 226, 228, 231, 249, 266, 267, 277, 303, 304
  Nambūtiri 193, 197, 203, 219
  Cākyār 192, 193, 205, 206, 217, 218, 220
  Chamar 155
  Cow Herder (Raut) 137, 140, 141
  Gardener 99
  Gujar 115, 166, 170
  Harijan 140
  Jat 155, 166–171, 175, 176, 179
    Jat-Rajput identity 169
  Kayastha 77
  Khoja 178
  Mandapa 283
  Manganiyai 165
  Marār 131
  Marathas 167
  Marwari 260
  Merchant (Banīya/Banya) 87, 89, 99, 171, 172
  Merchant (saudāgar) 78, 182
  Nambyār 192, 216–234
  Nāyar 189, 205, 217, 219, 225, 231
  Oil Presser 163, 176–182
    Ganga Telin 180
  Pandit 162, 178, 194
  Potter 87, 89, 100
  Rajput 84, 85, 92, 98, 99, 103, 116, 160, 169–171, 174, 175, 181, 182, 184
    Rajput Kacchwahas 167

Sahu 140, 143, 146,
savarṇṇa 189, 235,
Sweepers 95, 182
Thakur 169, 170, 177–181, 183
Vāriyar 206, 207, 210–213, 215, 217, 220, 223, 229, 230, 236
Washerwoman 144
chastity 245, 246, 249–255, 257
chess 64
Chhattisgarh 6, 130–148, 150–152, 160
Chhattisgarhi 130–140, 142–148, 150–153
Chishti Sufi Khwaja Farid-ud-Din Ganj-i-Shakkar 42, 43
Chola 284, 287, 292
cikāṛā 157, 158, 159
cimṭā 158, 159
Cinderella 6
Cochin193, 196, 204, 206, 207
Condition Mother 112
commotion (*fitna*) 51, 52
cowrie shell 161, 171, 180

Damayanti Kathā Campu 262
Darba 131, 132, 140, 141, 144
darśan 117, 149
dāsa/dashā 112
Dasa Mata 11, 84–86, 88–98, 100–102, 104, 109, 111–124, 127
Dasa Mata's string/thread 85, 86, 88–92, 95, 96, 98, 99, 113, 119, 120, 122, 125
Mother Ten 112, 115
Deccan 50, 52–54, 57, 167
Delhi 39, 41, 47, 132, 159, 167, 168
demon 97, 143, 161, 164, 172, 181, 209–214, 216, 222, 223, 231, 234, 235, 283, 302
dervish 50, 54, 55, 66
desire (*shauq*) 69, 76, 294, 295, 296, 298, 299, 304
Devaprabhasuri 262
Dewal Rani Khiz Khani 44, 47
dharma 126, 146, 210
dharma sister 94
dharma brother 161
Dharmaraja/Dharm Raja 13, 36, 145
Dharmadasganivir 261
Ḍholā 5, 155, 156, 157–164, 165, 166, 168, 170, 171, 175, 182–184
Ḍholā-mārū 157, 163–164, 165, 166
ḍholā melody 158, 159
ḍholak 141, 157, 158, 159
Dholpur 168
Dhūrtākhyāna 269
dice/dice game 3, 5, 7, 12–14, 19, 20, 26, 31, 35, 36, 66, 136–138, 143–145, 163, 165, 172, 175, 179, 180, 266, 275, 277, 280, 286, 300, 301, 305, 306
đivān 44
Doordarshan 132
Draupadi 90, 145, 245
Dravidian 190–193, 201, 204, 205, 218, 224, 234
Durga 161, 174, 175, 177, 178, 181, 183
Dvāpara/Dvapara/Dvarpa 18, 19, 136, 212, 279, 280

faith (*wafa'*) 65
faithful 11, 22, 27, 35, 136, 143, 258
Faizi see Abu'l Faiz ibn Mubarak
fate 11, 12, 21, 23, 24–25, 58, 84, 88, 95, 97, 98–100, 111, 118, 119–124, 126, 134, 136, 173, 176, 209, 211, 216, 267, 299, 303, 304
  Mother Fate 84, 112
folk melody 159
folk performance 130
folk songs 159, 204
folklore 131, 138, 140, 156
frenzy (*junūn*) 45, 49, 52, 58, 60, 63–65, 72, 73
  frenzy of passion (*shorish-junūn*) 63, 65, 69

gambling 24, 63, 66–69, 86, 90, 97, 110, 144, 179, 180, 257, 258, 271
gambling-house (*qimār-khāna*) 63
Ganesh/Ganapati 10, 116, 117, 118
Gaṅgā/Ganga 47, 162, 172, 220
genre 6, 9–11, 114, 130–132, 134, 139, 142, 147, 149, 151, 155, 156, 158, 159, 187–189, 191–194, 197–199, 201, 203–205, 207, 210, 214, 216–218, 220, 221, 234, 235, 260, 261, 263
Ghatiyali 109, 110, 115
goddess worship 183
goose/geese 14, 135, 148, 150, 195, 243, 252, 277, 295, 296, 305
Greedy One (Lobhyā) 116, 117
Gujarat 6, 44, 165, 269
guru 156, 158, 160, 174
gypsy troupe 87, 89, 102

Harivaṃśa 274–278, 281
harmonium 141, 158
Heart of the Dice (*aksa-hṛdaya*) 4, 26, 31, 36, 305, 306
Heart of the Horses (*asva-hṛdaya*) 26, 31, 35, 305
Hemacandra 249, 251, 253, 257, 258, 261
hindi 5, 39, 72, 85, 92, 133, 147, 148, 165, 260
Hindu 39, 43, 74, 78, 118, 119, 151, 169, 171, 174, 182, 189, 232, 243–246, 248, 249, 252, 263, 269, 270
Holi 112, 125, 168
hubris 45

idol 46, 47, 49, 53, 56, 58, 70, 74
  idol-worshipper (*but-parast*) 78
iḷakiyāṭṭam (agitation dance) 208, 216
Indra 15, 16, 17, 18, 30, 162, 165, 210, 213, 227, 228, 232, 279, 296
Indrāṇi 232–234, 276
Indo-Persian 45, 71, 72
intellect (*'aql*) 45, 48–50, 52, 55, 63, 69
intoxicated (*mast*) 54
Iran 41, 43, 47, 49, 79
  Iranian 47, 53
Islam 39, 43
iṣṭadevatā 270

Jagannath's temple 170
Jain 164, 165, 242–263, 265, 268–275, 280, 281
Jaipur 168, 169
Jina 244–248, 250, 255, 258, 259, 262, 263
Jinabhadda 255, 272

Kali 4, 5, 7, 11, 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 34, 36, 45, 77, 121, 135–137, 144, 145, 161, 209–212, 214, 216, 222, 223, 225, 230, 234, 235, 247, 279, 280, 283, 285, 286, 294, 295, 300–303, 305–307, 310–312
kāmadevas 243, 244
Karkotaka 4, 25, 26, 31, 34, 36, 209, 211, 271, 294, 303, 306
karma 25, 34, 98, 243, 246, 247, 250, 255, 256, 262, 270–273, 304, 307
kathā 140, 162
kathakaḷi 165, 191, 204–208, 210, 211, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 223, 232, 234, 236–237
kāvya 11, 190, 191, 194, 196, 197, 208, 211, 223, 224, 229, 232,
Kerala 187–190, 192, 193, 195–207, 209, 211, 213, 216–219, 221–231, 233–23
kismat 119, 121
Kṛṣṇa/Krishna 148, 150, 244, 245, 248, 253, 254, 265, 267, 274, 275, 276, 277, 279, 280
Kshatriya 98, 169, 171, 172, 174, 175, 182, 279
Kubera 16, 17, 18, 252, 256, 257,
kuldevī/kuldevtā 88, 91, 101
Kuñcan Nambyār 216–234
Kuṇḍina/Kundina 228, 266, 276, 278
kūṭiyāṭṭam 192, 215

Lakhiyaban 164, 175, 181
Lakshmi 109, 112, 113
lok khandakāvya 165
Lorik 137–139, 143–145
love (*'ishq*) 3, 5, 6, 12–17, 21, 26, 30–32, 34, 35, 40, 41 45–53, 55–60, 61, 63–66, 68–74, 76–78, 122, 126, 135–138, 142, 144–146, 148, 149, 156, 161, 165, 178, 194, 214, 225, 242, 255, 257, 258, 260, 262, 263, 272, 273, 276–277, 280, 286, 290, 298, 310
  divine love (*'ishq-i haqīqī*) 50
  human love (*'ishq-i majāzī*) 50
  mother-love 126
Lover (*'āshiq*) 15, 32, 40, 45, 46, 49, 50, 55, 57, 58, 69, 70, 76, 122, 146, 195, 221, 277, 278, 280, 283, 285, 294, 295, 297–300, 302–305, 307, 308, 310, 312

Madarilal 157, 158, 171
Mahābhārata/Mahābhārat 1–4, 10, 11, 44, 51, 78, 82, 109–111, 121, 130, 132–134, 140, 145–147, 155, 160, 164, 165, 196–198, 209, 211,

212, 243, 246–248, 250, 255, 257, 260, 265–274, 276, 278, 279, 281
Mahadeva/Mahadevji 117, 171
mahākāvya 155, 192, 196, 199, 223, 234
mahāpuruṣa 245
Mainpuri 157, 159, 168
Malayalam 11, 187, 190, 191–194, 196, 205, 214, 218, 224, 230, 234, 236, 237
Maḷamaṅgalam 193–204, 206–208, 211, 213, 223, 224, 229–231
Maṇipravāḷam 190–194, 196, 197, 199, 200, 203–205, 218
Mani Ram 132–134, 141, 143
Manmohan 142, 147, 148, 150–152,
Mansukh Gujar 162, 163, 170, 172–174
Maravarman Kulacekara I 287
Markaz-i Adwār 43, 44
Mārtāṇḍa Varma 207, 215, 222
Maru 5, 163–164, 172, 181
masnavī 12, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 53, 72
Mathura 157, 166, 167, 168
mendicant 248, 249, 255, 258,
Motini 5, 161, 162, 164, 172, 173, 174, 175, 180, 182
Mughal 6, 38–42, 50, 51, 53, 61, 69, 75, 77, 78, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170
Mughal-Rajput alliance 167
Mulla 'Abdul Qadir Badayuni 42
munis 256, 257
Munshi Bhagwant Rai "Rahat"/ Munshi Lal Bhagvant Rai "Rahat" Kakrowi 39, 72, 73, 75, 77
Muslim 39, 78, 182

Nagarkot 157, 171
Naiṣadhacarita/Naiṣadhīyacarita 5, 6, 11, 165, 196–198, 213, 219, 220, 223, 224, 234
Najib-ud-daulah 168
Nalavenpa 12, 283, 293, 305
Naḷacampū 192, 261
Nalacarit 261, 262
Naḷacaritam 204–207, 210, 214, 215, 218, 221, 223, 227, 230, 231, 234, 236, 237
Nalopākhyāna 1, 3, 164, 294
Nārada/Narad 15, 161, 213, 214, 227, 228
Nārāyaṇan Nambūtiri *see* *Maḷamaṅgalam*
Nāvar 162, 163, 164, 172, 173, 176, 179
Navalgadh/Narvargarh 86, 89, 160
Navkār Mantra 247, 248, 254, 258,
Nir 87, 110, 126
Nizami Ganjawi 46, 71

oral epic 2, 131, 134, 139, 146, 155, 156, 158, 159, 182
oral message (*paighām*) 58
oral traditions 160
orders (*farmān*) 46
Ottakkuttar 292, 293

Padmāvat 39
pagan gods (*parīzhād/parīnazhādān*) 61–63
pān-seller 138, 143, 144
Pandavas 64, 130, 135, 266, 267,

Pandvani 6, 12, 130–134, 139–144, 146–151
Paramkuti 174
Parcheesi 119
Parnada 29, 32, 34
Pārvatī/Parvati 116, 118, 144, 220, 221, 277, 279
Patal Lok 161
pativrat/pativratā 90, 94, 102, 136, 143, 246
Pāṭṭu 190, 191, 193, 204
Persian 6, 12, 38–44, 46, 47, 62, 71–74, 78
Phul Singh Panjabi 162, 172–175
phylogentic models 10
Pipal Mother 113, 115
Pipal Tree 84, 86–88, 113
pleasure (*nishat*) 15, 29, 63, 76, 78, 125, 255, 256, 272
poet-laureate (*malik-ush-shu'rā*) 42
Prakrit 192, 260, 261, 269, 281
praśad 93, 101
pūjā 35, 86, 88, 92, 95, 123, 150, 232
Pukalentippulavar 6, 11, 283, 284, 286–290, 292–294, 301, 305, 309, 311, 312
Puliyurkkecikan 284
Punam Nambūtiri 197, 198, 203
Punya-śloka 23, 28
purāṇa 155, 191, 193, 203, 218, 243, 260, 261, 269, 277, 278
purity 62, 97–99, 259
Pushkar/Puskara 3, 13, 19, 20, 35, 36, 136, 137, 144

Raipur 131, 132,
Raja of Amber 167
Raja Pratham 160–162, 164, 171
Rajasthani 84, 97, 100, 109–112, 119, 121–123, 125, 126, 155–157, 160, 165, 166, 170, 260
Rāma/Ram 97, 219, 286, 287
Rāma Jāmadagnya 276
Rāmāyaṇa/Rāmāyaṇ 1, 2, 97, 130, 140, 142, 146, 147, 149, 150, 164, 182, 183, 269, 274, 287
Rāmcaritmānas 12, 139, 147,148, 152, 182
Ramsaptah 140, 147
Rani Manjha 160–162, 164
rasa 198, 207, 210, 215, 216, 223, 236,
Ravan 97, 143
riddle 7, 8, 12, 62, 111, 136, 137, 243, 292, 294, 304, 309, 311
ritual 2, 4, 6, 9, 11, 18, 23, 36, 76, 86, 92, 93, 96–100, 102, 104, 109–118, 120, 121, 123, 124, 127, 135, 156, 159, 244, 247, 256, 284, 286, 300
  ritual feast 84, 93, 94, 96, 98, 99, 101
  ritual friendship 146
  ritual performance 2
  ritual purity 97–99
Ṛtuparṇa/Rtuparna 4, 26, 29–32, 34–36, 271, 303–305
Rsivardhan 253, 256, 259
Rsivardhanasuri 248, 262
Rukmi 275–278,
Rukminī 265, 274–277, 279–281
Rutbarn 66–69

sacred thread (*zunnār*) 47, 53
  sacred thread ceremony 161

saddle of fire (*haudaj-i ātishīn*) 70
sagacity (*hūshiyārī*) 69
sages 4, 13, 15, 23, 24, 50, 54, 55, 70, 72, 161, 182, 266
Sairandhri vow 25, 27
sajjhāy (devotional poetry) 245, 261, 263
Śaṅkaradeva 274, 275, 276, 278, 279, 280
Sanskrit 2, 5, 38, 39, 42, 44, 69, 78, 82–84, 111, 119, 121–123, 130, 133, 134, 135, 145, 152, 160, 165, 187–197, 199, 201, 203–208, 211, 214–220, 223, 224, 227, 229, 230, 232–235, 237, 243, 246, 248, 255, 260, 261, 265, 266, 269, 270, 274, 281
Sanskrit epic 110, 111, 119, 121, 125, 126
Santinath 244, 247, 255, 258, 259, 270
Sarada Devi 183
Sarasvatī/Sarasvati 149, 213, 229, 232–234
satī 242–246, 252–254, 256–258, 260–263
Satnamis 140, 141,
saubhāgya 89, 95, 100–104
Sawai Jai Singh 167, 168
Sayar 86, 110, 126
semantic dimension 9
Seven Mothers (*Sapta-Mātṛka*) 233
Shah Jahan II 167
Shaikh Mubarak Nagauri 41, 43
Shani 5, 162, 163, 165, 175
Sharada Mai 149, 183
śāstras/shastric 133, 134, 139, 144, 146–152
Shi'ism 43
shortfall (*tafrīt*) 55
Śiśupāla 275, 276, 277, 278
Sita 90, 97, 102, 142, 143, 198, 203, 245, 286, 287
Śiva/Shiva 116–118, 144, 199, 200, 210, 220, 221, 225, 228, 245, 277
śloka 4, 5
snake husband 118
sorcerers 202
Somaprabhasuri (Jasabhadda) 248, 252, 255, 256, 257, 261
Śṛīharṣa 5, 6, 11, 165, 196–199, 211–213, 219, 223, 224, 227, 229, 230, 232, 234
Śrīnatha 5, 11
śṛṅgāra 142, 194, 197, 198, 200, 208
statecraft (*akhlāq*) 55
Subahu 24, 27, 28
Subhasilaganivir 245, 261, 262
Sudeva 27, 29, 30, 34
Śūdras 189, 204, 222, 226
Sufi 41, 50, 70, 72
Sulaiman wa Biqis 43
Sunanda 25, 27, 28
Suraj Mal 168, 169
svayamvara/svayamvar/svayamvaram 4, 5, 15– 19, 24, 30, 32, 34, 44, 61, 66, 68, 74, 87, 88, 123, 135, 137, 144, 145, 149–151, 162, 163,197, 198, 201, 212–214, 219, 228–230, 232 248, 249, 252, 253, 258,

271, 277, 279, 295, 296, 299, 304, 309
Śvetāmbar 260
Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak 242

tambūrā 132, 140, 141, 148,
Tamil 5, 10, 165, 174, 190–192, 219, 221, 226, 283, 284, 287, 288, 292, 296, 298, 308, 310, 312, 313
taṉiccŏl 288, 298, 308, 309
Tapā Gacch 242, 261, 262,
Telugu 11, 196
Tijan Bai 131, 132, 142,
tilaka/tilak 247, 250, 272
Travancore 207, 215, 221, 229
Trivikrama 261, 262
tuḷḷal 191, 203, 216–220, 223, 228, 230, 233, 234
Tulsidas 12, 139,148–151

Udaipur 84, 85, 92, 110, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123
Ujjain city 50, 54, 63, 67, 69, 114
Ulakuṭe Perumāḷ 221, 222, 223, 228, 234
unfaithfulness (*bīwafā'ī*) 70
Uṇṇāyi Vāriyar 206, 207, 211, 215, 217, 219, 220, 232, 234, 236
Upadeśaprasād Mahāgranth 258, 259
Urdu 39, 62, 72–77
urine (qārūra) 73

Vaiśampāyana 266
Vaisnava/Vaishnava 167, 222, 265, 274, 281
Varsneya 20, 26, 30, 31, 32
Varuna 16, 17, 18
Vasudev 244, 257
Vāsudevahindi 261
Vedas/Vedic 8, 21, 67, 83, 189,
venpa 284, 287, 288, 289, 292, 294, 298, 299, 308, 309, 311
Vidarbha 13, 14, 16, 20, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 35, 135, 200, 274, 275, 280, 304
Vijayanagara 196
Vikramaditya 165
viraha 208, 280
Viṣṇu/Vishnu 16, 199, 210, 213
vrat 84–86, 88, 89, 91–95, 99, 102, 114, 123
  vrat kathā 6, 11, 109, 114
Vrindaban 168
Vṛṣṇis 276
Vyasa 2, 10,

Wittgensteinian 10,
women's magic 120
women's ritual power 127
women's worship stories 110

Yama 17, 18
Yasobhadra 249, 255
Yudhiṣṭhira/Yudhishtar 4, 36, 135, 137, 145, 146, 266–268, 276, 278
yunānī medicine 52

Ziyauddin Desai 44, 45

A select list of titles from D.C. Publishers

Mother, Wife and Widow: Exploring Women's Lives in Northern India
Susan S. Wadley

This volume studies the impact of increased rural prosperity, gains in education, and urban influences on the lives of women in rural north India. It examines the changes in the economic system and demographic patterns in the village of Karimpur over the last 70 years, which show significant improvement in the economic condition of the people, child mortality and life expectancy, and education. These changes imply greater mobility, decision-making powers and increasing ages of marriage for some women, while others have been adversely affected, facing the double burden of poverty and caste discrimination due to the breaking up of joint families.

Essays on North Indian Folk Traditions
Susan S. Wadley

These essays provide a critical look at the accepted, largely high caste male-authored views of Hinduism and society in India. Using materials from the village known as Karimpur, the essays range from an examination of a rural ritual of snake possession, to the interplay between the participants in understanding "texts" and the worldviews elaborated in those texts.

Women in Colonial India: Essays on Politics, Medicine, and Historiography
Geraldine Forbes

This collection of essays on politics, medicine, and historiography is about the "new women" of the late nineteenth century, as participants in nationalist politics and colonial schemes to provide Western medicine for women, and as subjects of women's history. Geraldine Forbes utilizes personal accounts, oral history, and photographs alongside more conventional archival documents.

Our books are distributed by Orient Blackswan Pvt. Ltd.

"Because I am a woman": A child widow's memoirs from colonial India by Haimabati Sen

Tapan Raychaudhuri & Geraldine Forbes

This richly detailed and intimate memoir chronicles the life of one of India's earliest "native" women doctors. Born c. 1866 and married before she was 10, Haimabati became a child-widow within a year. Her narrative illustrates in great detail the hard lives of girls and women who flouted social conventions. Originally written in Bengali, this document was translated by Tapan Raychaudhuri and edited by Geraldine Forbes and Raychaudhuri following extensive research on Haimabati's life and times.

Rites of Spring: Gajan in Village Bengal

Ralph Nicholas, with an essay by David Curley

Gajan is a ritual of the common village people of Bengal created from indigenous sources and heavily laden with symbols of fertilization and reproduction. The book analyzes the meaning of the rituals and narratives of Gajan and their social and historical contexts.

Fruits of Worship: Practical Religion in Bengal

Ralph W. Nicholas

The essays in this book deal with the religious life of ordinary people in rural Bengal. Through detailed analysis of the religious acts of ordinary people the author builds up a uniquely complex picture of the world in its totality implicit in the culture of the villages of the Bengal delta.

Barisal and Beyond: Essays on Bangla Literature

Clinton B. Seely

This volume starts by looking back to the author's early experience of Bengal in Barisal, Bangladesh and goes on to analyze important works of Bangla writers including those of Rabindranath Tagore, Jibanananda Das, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Mir Mosharraf Hosain, Rizia Rahman among others. The volume also examines the work of English-language authors of the Indian diaspora including Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Jhumpa Lahiri.

Renaissance Reborn: In Search of a Historical Paradigm

Edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri

The term "Renaissance" has been used to refer to various movements in cultural history – originally in Europe, and later, by extension, to other civilizations. This book brings together a collection of articles by thirteen Italian and Indian scholars on the European and Indian renaissances. Between them they cover the work of major writers in Europe and India; cultural and socio-historic movements like humanism, nationalism, the Reformation and Orientalism; and crucial social sectors like the growth of the vernaculars, the changing status of women and pursuit of science.

Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-Kabya and Social Change in Precolonial Bengal

David Curley

This book analyzes Bengali *mangal-kabya*, a genre of narrative literature. The first essay argues that the didactic purposes of *mangal-kabyas* and the performative pleasures based upon satire make them rich sources for historians of precolonial Bengal. Three essays focus on *Candimangal* texts, especially the version by Mukunda Cakrabarti. Three later essays employ more usual sources for writing social history in order to relate *mangal-kabya* texts to their historical contexts.

The Art of the Intellect: Uncollected English Writings of Sudhindranath Datta

Edited by Sukanta Chaudhuri

This volume contains all the recoverable English writings of the Bengali poet and critic Sudhindranath Datta, outside those already gathered in an earlier collection. The pieces testify to his informed interest and original thought about Indian and European literature, ancient history, international politics, philosophical speculation and the social mores of his time.

Editor

Susan S. Wadley is Ford Maxwell Professor of South Asian Studies at Syracuse University, where she is also Director of the South Asia Center and Associate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences. Her publications include *Shakti: Power in the Conceptual Structure of Karimpur Religion; Struggling with Destiny in Karimpur, 1925-1984; Raja Nal and the Goddess: The North Indian Oral Epic Dhola; Essays on North Indian Folk Traditions;* and *Wife, Mother, Widow: Exploring Women's Lives in Northern India.*

Contributors

Muzaffar Alam
Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger
Rich Freeman
Ann Grodzins Gold
Phyllis Granoff
Lindsey Harlan
M. Whitney Kelting
Velcheru Narayana Rao
David Shulman
Sanjay Subrahmanyam
Susan S. Wadley

Jacket images: 'Damayanti chooses Prince Nala as her Husband' by Warwick Goble from *Indian Myth and Legend;* 'Damayanti and the Swan' by Raja Ravi Verma (front)

Jacket design by Mitrarun Halder

CHRONICLE BOOKS

Damayanti and Nala

The Many Lives of a Story

Edited by Susan S. Wadley

"The Mahabharata episode known as the Nalopakhyana is an elegant, fast-paced narrative, … the story it tells is one of the most popular in India, existing in all Indian languages, often in many versions in various languages. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of Nala stories exist. Wherever one goes in the sub-continent, Nala was there first."

Velcheru Narayana Rao & David Shulman

ISBN 81-8028-037-3

9 788180 280375